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TO

SAMUEL ROGERS, Esq.

Sir,

In begging you to accept the dedication of this work, I am influenced by a feeling of gratitude, due to those who have contributed by their productions to improve and elevate our sentiments in early life, and by the consideration that "Lives of ıe Italian Poets" could not be more appropriately dedicated than to a poet, and one who has sung of "*Italy*" in strains so deeply imbued as your's with the native elegance of her Muse.

With these feelings I lay my work before you, happy that, in so doing, I have an opportunity of expressing publicly the admiration and respect I have long entertained for your name and genius.

Henry Stebbing.

London, Dec. 28th, 1830.

PREFACE.

It had long been a favourite idea with me, before commencing the present work, that the Lives of the Italian Poets offered a subject on which the pen of the biographer might be employed with the greatest advantage. The men whose fortunes he would have to describe appeared to my imagination invested with singular dignity and splendour. Many of them lived in times when genius conferred upon its possessors rank and influence as well as fame; others had to pass through vicissitudes with which it is always instructive and animating to see the human mind virtuously and successfully struggling; and all of them had a deep and enthusiastic veneration for their art, which renders their career worthy of the

constant observation and imitation of literary men of other ages and countries. It was in this light that the subject first presented itself to me as abounding in topics of the highest interest; nor is it in a purely literary point of view less deserving of attention. Italy was the cradle of modern learning, and to her poets we owe in great measure its present diffusion among the people of Europe. Princes have occasionally fostered men of learning, but it is the poets who have fostered learning itself; and while the lives of these great men are left unstudied, we keep closed one of the most useful and valuable volumes in the history of the human mind. In addition to these considerations, there is one peculiarly applicable to English readers. The Italian Muse held early commerce with our own, and taught her some of the sweetest mysteries of her art; and in the present day several of our most elegant writers have thought themselves well employed in giving their countrymen an opportunity of enjoying the noble sentiments and brilliant inventions of Italian genius in their own language.

The names of Carey, of Rose, and Wiffen, need but be mentioned to remind the English reader, that in transferring the works of the three greatest poets of Italy into our mother tongue, translation has been carried to a degree of perfection scarcely in any instance before attained; while the name of Roscoe, so worthy in every respect of veneration, reminds us how much has been done in this country to make known the most important periods of Italian history. Nor is there any reason to fear that the literature which so many circumstances tend to make popular in this country, should at present lose any portion of its popularity. More than one of its most distinguished scholars have lived among us, employing their talents in facilitating its study; and in Dr. Panizzi, the judicious and accomplished Professor at the London University, we have another instance of the advantage a country reaps in becoming the sojourn of these learned and enlightened strangers.

In writing these volumes, I have avoided, to

the best of my ability, diminishing the value of the subject by any want of care in selecting the materials. The number of works I have read and compared has been very considerable, and the facts of every memoir have been drawn from the most authentic sources; all, with one or two slight exceptions, Italian, as will be seen by the references. Whatever other blame, therefore, I may incur, I shall not, I trust, when the size and nature of the work are considered, be accused of rendering it less valuable in point of information than it might have been made. There were many collateral subjects both of history and criticism into which my own taste would have led me at length, while writing the memoirs; but it has been with some difficulty that I have comprised within the limits allowed me, the details which more strictly belonged to my province as a biographer.

For the opportunities I have enjoyed of consulting a much greater variety of works than I possess myself, I have to acknowledge my obligations to the Library of the British Museum, which, besides

the valuable Italian collection it previously contained, has been lately enriched with that which belonged to the lamented Ginguené. For the facilities afforded me by the conductors of the Institution, and for their uniformly prompt and kind attention, I am, in common with many other literary men, most deeply indebted. The same thanks are also due from me to Mr. Rolandi, the Italian bookseller, of Berners-street, who has with great liberality afforded me the use of many valuable works.

The Life of Dante.

Dante.

The fortunes of Dante received so strong a colouring both from his own character and that of the times in which he lived, that could the story of a life be described in a single picture, that in which his were painted would be one of the most remarkable in existence. He was at once the father of a literature and the creator almost of a language—the poet who first boldly led the way to a spiritual world of imagination, scarcely yet known to genius itself, and at the same time one of the sternest and most active politicians of his age and country.

The family of Dante could boast of great an-

tiquity; and genealogists have amused themselves with his pedigree almost as much as critics with the allegory of his poems. From the mass, however, of obscure records which remain to assist us in settling the line of his ancestors, it may be decided with some degree of certainty to whom the family owed its origin. The supposition, which was for some time supported, that Eliseus, the parent of the race, existed in the reign of Julius Cæsar, has been long rejected; but it is allowed by many writers that he lived as early as that of Charlemagne, about which period he is said to have removed from Rome, and settled in Florence, where he speedily acquired considerable distinction.

The descendants of this Eliseus were very numerous, and in the twelfth century one of them assumed the name of Cacciaguida, married into the noble family of the Aldighieri, or Alighieri of Ferrara, and distinguished himself in the unfortunate crusade of the Emperor Conrad, but fell a victim to his devout heroism.* He left behind him three sons, one of whom took the name of his mother, and became the immediate ancestor of our poet, who was accustomed to regard him as the true founder of his race.†

* Villani, Boccaccio. † Paradiso, Can. XV. ver. 137.

Dante, the third only in descent from the first Aldighieri, was born at Florence in the month of May 1265, and christened in the church of Saint John the Baptist, by the name Durante, afterwards shortened into that by which he is usually known.

Visions and prophecies taught his parents to expect the birth of a prodigy in their new offspring. His mother, during her pregnancy, dreamt that she saw him nourished by the fruit of a laurel, and drinking the waters of a pure mystical fountain. His infant form then seemed to expand into manly beauty, and after she had for some time delighted herself with his noble aspect, he again sunk into the earth, but almost instantly re-appeared in the dazzling shape of a majestic peacock. The astrological predictions of the learned Brunetto Latini agreed with the maternal presentiments of Bella, and the light of Italy, given to his age and country, according to Boccaccio, by the special grace of God, was welcomed at his birth by as many lofty hopes as tender caresses.*

The father of the favoured infant died before any of these brilliant expectations could be realized, but the heart of his mother was too much strengthened by the hopes she had conceived, to

* Origine, &c. Di Dante.

fail in any of her parental duties. Being left provided with an ample fortune, she chose for his instructors the ablest and most celebrated men of Florence, among whom was the Brunetto before mentioned, a scholar of great eminence, and who had done more than any of his contemporaries towards the establishment of his native literature. The love of virtue, and a noble, contemplative disposition, gave early indications of the genius which inspired our poet, and the first years of his youth were distinguished by the same enthusiasm in study for which he was distinguished in the subsequent actions of his eventful life.

Not being obliged by necessity to pursue any profession, and preferring independence to wealth, he seems to have given himself up from his earliest years to the free indulgence of his natural taste, and to have loved poetry and philosophy solely for the inexhaustible treasures they opened to his mind. Nor was it, even in his youth, his imagination only that he sought to gratify in these pursuits: he endeavoured under the veil of fiction to discover the divine features of truth, and the solemn visions of religion seem to have held dominion over his thoughts long before they were transferred to his poetry. It appears also that

when still very young he entered the order of Minor Friars, but his mind, though strongly inclined to speculative theology, was too active for either the studies or the life of a monk, and he never completed his noviciate.*

It is doubtful whether Dante finished his education at Florence, or studied during some part of his youth at Bologna. Most of his biographers incline to the former opinion;† but however this may be, he is known to have cultivated an early intimacy with the most celebrated artists and literary men of his native city. In the society of the former he found a relaxation from severer mental exercise, and Casella, a distinguished musician of the time, and the painters Giotto and Oderigi were among his most constant associates. He also employed himself, it is said, in the frequent exercise of a natural talent for music and painting, his mind seeming to be possessed in some degree of every kind of power and faculty by which human nature can the better sympathize with what is grand or beautiful in the world without.

But the youth of Dante was the subject of another spell besides that of his richly endowed and creative intellect. Of those who have immor-

* Pelli, Memorie della Vita di Dante. † Tiraboschi.

talized their love in song, none have more intimately united their name and immortality, both as men and poets, with the memory of their mistresses than Dante. When he first saw Beatrice Portinari, he was little more than nine years old, and the details he has himself left respecting this youthful passion, have so much the air of a romance, that they have been frequently passed over with much less attention than they merit. When it is considered how much greater influence his love for Beatrice seems to have had upon his mind than any other circumstance of his life; how much more present her image is to the reader of the "Commedia" than any other of the numerous personages it mentions; how closely, in fact, the names of Dante and Beatrice must remain united so long as Italian literature exists; we shall not fail to regard every notice that remains of their connexion as of the highest value—not as it may satisfy curiosity, far more particular in such cases than philosophy, about the exactness of trifling facts, but as serving to indicate the tone of feeling and sentiment which characterised the youth of this great man.

Folco Portinari, the father of Beatrice, was a citizen of distinction, and it was the custom in

Florence, at that period, for the better class of the inhabitants to keep the first of May with open house and various kinds of rejoicing. Dante, on the present occasion, happened to be among the guests of Portinari, and the little *Bice*, as her friends called her, who was about the same age as himself, was so gentle and beautiful, that she immediately attracted his regard. In a few years the child-like affection he had conceived for her ripened into a deeper feeling, and wholly occupied his thoughts. To this he attributes the earliest exercise of his muse,* and the following sonnet is the first of his printed compositions. It contains an address to all who had any experience in the mysteries of love, and were likely to interpret the meaning of his poetic visions.

A ciascun' alma presa, e gentil core,
Nel cui cospetto vien' il dir presente
In ciò che mi riscrivan, suo parvente
Salute in lor Signor, cioè Amore.
Gia eran' quasi ch' atterzate l'hore
Del tempo ch' ogni stella è piu lucente
Quando m' apparve amor subitamente
Cui essenza sembrar, mi dà horrore.

* Vita Nuova.

Allegro mi sembrava Amor' tenendo,
Mio cor' in mano, e nelle braccia havea
Madonna involta in un drappo dormendo
Poi la svegliava, e desto cor ardendo
Lei paventosa humilmente pascea
Appresso gir' lo ne.vedea piangendo.

To every captive soul and gentle heart,
For whom I sing, what sorrows strange I prove!
I wish all grace, and may their master, Love,
Present delight and happy hopes impart.
Two thirds of night were spent, but brightly clear
The stars were shining, when surprised I saw
Love, whom to worship is my will and law;
Glad was his aspect, and he seemed to bear
My own heart in his hand, while on his arms,
Garmented in her many folded vest,
Madonna lay, with gentle sleep oppress'd;
But he awoke her filled with soft alarms,
And with that burning heart in humble guise
Did feed her, till in gloom the vision fled my eyes.

This sonnet was answered by several poets of the day, and among others, by Guido Cavalcanti, a scholar of great reputation, and distinguished for the excellence of his manners as well as literary talents. He wrote a poem in the vulgar tongue on the art of rhetoric, and another on love, so much admired at the time, that it was commented upon

by several scholars, both of that and the succeeding age: but, taking a part in the political factions of his country, he was driven into exile, and remained abroad till a change of affairs enabled him to return to Florence, where he died in the year 1300 or 1301. His imagination is said to have been strongly tinctured by pride and passionate feeling, which made him prefer solitude to the world; but there was a sufficient similarity between his disposition and that of Dante to lay the foundation of a lasting acquaintance; and our young poet had the satisfaction of obtaining, through the means of his sonnet, the friendship of a man whose example and encouragement could not fail of being greatly beneficial to him.

The Muse of Italy could hardly be said to have left her cradle at the period when Dante began to write. The first European poets were the Provençals, who borrowed much, both of their art and materials, from the Arabians. As early as the end of the eleventh century, or the beginning of the twelfth, William Count of Poictiers was distinguished for his skill in Provençal poetry. The only people who had any pretension to dispute the praise of antiquity with the French Troubadours were the Sicilians. Towards the latter part of the

twelfth century they had begun to forsake the use of Latin in composition, and produced several specimens of poetry in their native language or Italian. Ciullo, or Vicenzo d'Alcamo, a Sicilian, is said to have been one of the first writers who composed in the vulgar dialect; and a canzone of his, which mentions the celebrated Saladin, who made himself master of Jerusalem in 1187, fixes the birth of Italian poetry to a time not long prior to that period.*

It is, however, contended by some authors, that several poets had already risen in different parts of Italy, to whom the honour is due of having first employed their native language in verse; but their opinion is controverted by the judicious Tiraboschi, and there seems little reason to doubt that Sicily was the real birth-place of Italian poetry. The accession, moreover, of Frederick the Second to the throne of that country in 1197 contributed, in a great degree, to the advancement of its literature. No monarch, either before or after him, merits greater praise for love of letters. His court was the resort of the minstrels of all countries; he founded Universities, promoted the labours of the scholars of his age by both praise and patronage,

* Crescimbeni, Storia della Volgar Poesia.

and set the example of employing the language of his country in poetry by composing in it himself. He was followed in this practice by his son, and still more so, by his celebrated Chancellor, Pier delle Vigne, one of the most able men of his age. The names of several other Sicilian poets follow immediately after these; and, among others, that of the famous Nina, who, falling in love with Dante di Maiano, a Florentine poet, whom she had never seen, assumed his name, and was commonly known among her contemporaries as the Nina di Dante.

Italy itself, besides the Dante here mentioned, and whose verses are said to have possessed no visible excellence sufficient to account for their enamouring a lady, had, at the commencement of the thirteenth century, several other writers of the same calibre; and the reader will be a little surprised, perhaps, to hear that the venerators of Saint Francis assert his right to be placed among the number, in virtue of a Canticle entitled "Il Sole," to be found in his works. None of these writers, as may be supposed, have much claim to consideration; and the language in which Ciullo and the rest wrote, is rude and unmusical, and mixed up with the harsh idioms of the half-latinized Sicilian.

The first Italian author who wrote in a some-

what more polished style, was Guido Guinicelli, who lived in the middle of the thirteenth century. Dante names him with great praise, and calls him his father, and the father of all the other poets.* Onesto and Cino da Pistoia wrote also about the same period, and a little later appeared Guitone d'Arezzo, Buonagiunta da Lucca, Guido Cavalcanti, and the celebrated master of Dante, Brunetto Latini. This last named writer deserves more particular attention than any of his contemporaries, not merely from his having been the preceptor of our poet, but as the author of a work which has been ingeniously supposed to have furnished the foundation of the Divina Commedia.†

It is uncertain in what year Brunetto was born, but he is mentioned as a scholar of eminence in 1260. When the party of the Guelfs was driven from Florence, he shared in their misfortune, and retreated to France, in which country he is supposed to have resided many years, as he learned the language sufficiently well to compose in it his chief work, the Tresor. He, however, returned to Florence, and died there in the year 1294. According to the testimony of Giovanni Villani, he was a great philosopher, a perfect master in rhe-

* Purgatorio, canto xxvi. v. 112. † Ginguené.

toric, in knowing how to speak well and in di[illegible]. The same author also says, that he was t[illegible] who refined the Florentines, and taught them to speak correctly, to be wise in judgment, and [illegible] the Republic according to the rules of good [illegible]." Besides the Tresor above mentioned, B[illegible] wrote another work, which he entitled the Tes[illegible], or Little Treasure, and a translation of Cicer[illegible] book on Invention, with a comment. The [illegible] is a kind of abridgment, or analysis of the Bible, with the maxims of Solon, and Pliny the naturalist. It is divided into three parts, each of which consists of several books, which respectively treat of the history of the Old and New Testament—of the elements—of heaven and earth—and of the inhabitants and productions of the latter. The second part contains a treatise on the Virtues and Vices, and an abridgment of parts of Aristotle; while the third contains rules on the art of speaking and governing. The "Tesoretto," it is said, was not written till after the return of its author, and is nothing more than a collection of moral precepts, in verse.

Of the state of literature, in general, at this period, it may be observed, that it was little favourable to the developement of original genius. The

* Tiraboschi.

host of writers of Latin verse had so long employed language in a harsh, scholastic, or violently affected style, that it had almost ceased to be the medium for expressing natural feeling. Philosophy was confined entirely to the systems of Aristotle and his disciples, badly understood, and still worse employed; and theology had long adopted those dogmas which rendered it for so many ages useless to mankind, burdensome to the hearts as well as intellects of its professors, and unfitted to represent the sublime mysteries with which it is concerned. But to return to Dante.

If we are to believe his own account of his passion for Beatrice, he suffered long and deeply before he could discover with certainty that his love was returned. A timid, courteous smile was the only support of his hope for months together. His health was materially affected from the anxiety which thus preyed on his spirits, and his feverish fancy, often getting the better of reason, filled his mind with a thousand agitating visions. Sometimes we find him imagining that he saw the beloved Beatrice clad in angelic vestments, but still wearing the smiles of youthful love—at others, that he heard her voice in the deepest silence of midnight, accompanied by celestial music; and then

these visions and sounds would change into others of a more melancholy character, and Beatrice appeared divested entirely of her earthly form, and addressing him in the language of spirits.*

We may reasonably believe that the account he has left us of his early passion is too strongly coloured to be received literally; but there can be little doubt that it is, in general, a faithful representation of what love is in such a mind, and that, if his dreams were not all so distinct and palpable as he describes them to have been, his waking thoughts were not unfrequently wrought into images far warmer and brighter than the passing recollections of ordinary men.

Interesting, indeed, as passages of this kind are in the lives of poets, we must generally be content with those dream-like intimations of the truth which lie scattered up and down their works. Many important points unfortunately are thus necessarily left in doubt; and it not unfrequently happens that the real facts have less agreement with the suggestions of our imaginations than might be wished. It is contended by many writers that Beatrice, after having been for years the object of Dante's passionate affection, became the wife of a

* Vita Nuova.

Cavalier de' Bardi, the supposition resting on the evidence of a document containing a certificate of the marriage.* But, however this may have been, the poet continued to regard her as he had done from his earliest youth: his later sonnets and canzoni are all equally fervent, and express the same delight in every token he could discover of regard. There is scarcely, perhaps, sufficient evidence either to prove or disprove the assertion respecting the marriage of Beatrice. The record of the circumstance is generally allowed to have the appearance of authenticity; but, on the other hand, it is singular that Dante should not have made allusions to it in his poems, if the marriage really took place, while, again, we might account for this circumstance by recollecting that it was the natural habit of Dante's mind to spiritualize whatever he described; and perhaps of his feelings to separate the objects in which they centred from things earthly and temporal.—Thus, if he found his hopes blighted in respect to Beatrice by her marriage, he might favour this disposition of his imagination, and striving to forget that human ties had made her the wife of another, still think and write of her

* Pelli. Mem.

only as his youthful mistress, to whose virtues his spirit had so long rendered homage.

But the uncertainty which attends inquiry into these incidents is rendered of less consequence by our knowledge that Beatrice died soon after she and Dante had reached their five-and-twentieth year. He has not left any mention of the immediate cause of her death, but it may be gathered from incidental allusions to her person and appearance, that her health was generally delicate; it may also be conjectured that grief for the loss of her father, whom she tenderly loved, and whose death occurred a short time before her own, had a dangerous effect on her weak frame, and probably tended to hasten her dissolution. There is reason, indeed, to believe that this event had been some time expected by her lover and her friends; the dreams of the former were filled with sad prognostics, and his sonnets teem with expressions of the fears that destroyed his repose. Amid all the metaphysical niceties and ill-consorted images which disfigure these his earliest compositions, it is easy to discover the earnest melancholy which oppressed him at this period; he seems to have been cheered by no gleamings of youthful hope, his expressions and

comparisons being almost all drawn from visions of another world.

When he received intelligence of the death of Beatrice, his mind was for some time too oppressed with sorrow to admit of consolation; as soon, however, as he began to recover composure, he had recourse to the means which he had already more than once found successful in lightening his troubles, and the muse seems to have proved a better comforter than his most diligent friends. But though he found much relief from this return to his former pursuits, his cure was yet far from being effected, and the temporary dissipation of his melancholy was owing to a much stronger stimulant. We fortunately possess his own authority for the following circumstances.

It one day happened that as he was brooding over the recollection of his beloved mistress, he saw, at the window of a neighbouring house, a lady of the most exquisite loveliness. Her eyes were fixed upon his melancholy figure with a look of deep sympathy, and her countenance, pale and expressive, was the counterpart of the image so strongly impressed on his heart. His tears, he says, fell freer as he contemplated this fair resemblance of his Beatrice, and he wrote sonnet after

sonnet declaring the consolation he found in the sympathy she rendered his sufferings. At length, however, he perceived that his eyes began to take a greater delight in the graces of the living beauty than was consistent with the devout remembrance of Beatrice. Discovering his danger, he reproached himself in the bitterest manner for what he termed the vileness of his heart and the vanity of his eyes; and thus expresses himself in one of the sonnets written at the time.

Color d'amore, e di pietà sembianti
Non preser mai così mirabilmente
Viso di donna per veder sovente
Occhi gentili, e dolorosi pianti;
Come lo vostro qual' hora davanti
Vedetevi la mia labbia dolenti;
Si che per voi mi vien così a la mente
Ch' io temo forte ho lo cor si schianti
Io non posso tener gli occhi distrutti,
Che non riguardin voi molte fiate,
Per desidero di pianger ch' egli hanno:
E voi crescete si lor volontate,
Che de la voglia si consuman tutti;
Ma lagrimar dinanzi a voi non sanno.

The form of pity and the hue of love,
Never before did beauteous lady's face,
From gentle looks and sighs deep sorrows move,
Take with such perfect and such wondrous grace

As thine, who late beheld me while I went,
With looks that only pity did bespeak;
But now my thoughts, on thee too frequent bent,
Teach me to fear that with a heart so weak,
My eyes will ever seek thee, and intent
Rest fondly on thy pale and sadden'd brow—
Sad with that love of grief which in thee dwells;
Thus you their wish increase that tears would flow,
But with that wish my heart so anxious swells
That in thy presence, captive held, in vain
I seek by tears to mitigate its pain.

Some doubts, however, it must be confessed, appear to have agitated his mind as to the course he should pursue with respect to his incipient passion. He was not entirely without a feeling that at his age, and with the powers of his mind in full strength, he ought to seize upon any possible remedy for the gloom which oppressed him. Passion and reason continued this conflict for some time, and the struggle was in full activity, when memory came to the aid of truth and decided the contest. "One day," says he, "about the ninth hour, a strong imagination impressed me, and I thought I saw my only Beatrice clad in that purple vestment which she wore when I first saw her, and with the same youth upon her countenance." His thoughts instantly reverted to all the circumstances

which had occupied them in past years; he was abashed and weighed down with his want of fidelity to a mistress he had so passionately adored: his eyes, thus rightly rewarded, he continues, for their vanity, were inflamed by constant weeping, and he only ceased from the strife by completely triumphing over his error. In a sonnet, written before he was quite assured of success in this trial of his faith, he thus accuses the principal offenders on the occasion.

L' amaro lagrimar, che voi faceste
Occhi miei così lunga stagione;
Facea meravigliar l'altre persone
De la pietate, come voi vedeste:
Hora mi par che voi l'obliereste,
S' io fusse dal mio lato sì fellone,
Ch' io no ven disturbasse ogni cagione,
Membrandovi colei, cui voi piangeste,
La vostra vanità mi fa pensare,
E spaventami sì, ch' io temo forte
Del viso d' una donna, che vi mira.
Voi non dovreste mai, se non per morte,
La nostra donna, ch' è morta, obliare,
Così dice il mio core, e poi sospira.

The bitter tears, my eyes! which once ye shed
With such a fond and long unchanging woe,
In many a gentle heart deep wonder bred,
And bid soft pity in the bosom glow;

But, ah! I fear that ye could all forget
Would my heart join you in the felon wrong,
And let those memories fade which still belong
To her for whom ye were so often wet:
Vain wandering eyes! so do I fear your guile
That much I dread when you her form admire
To meet one gentle lady's pitying smile.
Oh ne'er forgetful be, till life expire,
Of one sweet mistress who untimely died:—
Thus spoke my heart, and speaking deeply sighed.

But the mind of Dante was, at the same time, occupied by other thoughts beside those of love and poetry, or, if we may venture to form an imaginary thread for this portion of his life, the peculiar state of his feelings might induce him to seek relief in the occupations to which he now eagerly devoted himself. In conformity with the custom of the Republic, and as necessary to all who aspired to the honours of the magistracy, he had early enrolled himself in one of the companies into which the whole body of the Florentine citizens was divided. The number of these companies was at first fourteen, but afterwards twenty-one, and they were separated into two classes, termed major and minor, according to the dignity of the arts which their respective members professed. The sixth company consisted of persons devoted to the science

of medicine and surgery, and it was to this that our poet united himself; not, it is probable, with any intention of practising the art, but because it was most nearly connected with his philosophical pursuits. Without, however, waiting for the period when he might expect to be called to the service of his country in some civil capacity, he seized the opportunity of proving his patriotism against its enemies in the field. Having for some time had cause to complain of the people of Arezzo, in which city the Ghibellines had their head-quarters, Florence determined upon sending a strong military force to repress their insolence. Dante volunteered his services on the occasion, and on the plain of Campaldino, where his countrymen gained a complete victory, distinguished himself among the bravest of the troops. In the following year we find him again employed in the army of the Republic, now at war with Pisa, and reaping the same praise for his conduct as in the former expedition. He was not, however, suffered to repeat the experiment of seeking relief from the wounds of love or regret in the exertions to which his active mind prompted him. Notwithstanding the bad success of the idea, as proposed by himself, his friends determined on trying if love might not be cured by

transferring it from one object to another, an undertaking compared by Boccaccio to that of a physician who should endeavour to cure an acute fever by fire, or an ague by immersion in ice or snow, or to refresh any one sick and feeble by carrying him from the sweet air of Italy into the burning heats of sandy Libya, or the eternal gloom of Mount Rhodope; for certainly, says he, no one else would ever have conceived the notion of curing *amorous tribulations* with a wife. But whatever was the folly of the idea, the friends and relations of Dante resolved that marriage should be tried, and whether the experiment appeared less foolish in his eyes than in those of his biographer, or that long indisposition and grief had weakened his resolution, he assented to the proposal and received a wife at their hands.

The lady to whom our poet thus trusted the future peace of his life, was Gemma di Manetto de' Donati, a woman of high birth and fortune, but of a temper the very reverse of that which could promise happiness, under the circumstances in which the marriage took place. Dante's love of Beatrice was known to all Florence: his mind was still under the influence of a passionate melancholy, and he had vowed to immortalize his youthful mistress by

the best efforts of his genius.* It was highly improbable that, thus intent on the former object of his love, and with an imagination strongly wrought upon by such recollections, he would readily subject himself even to the ordinary run of domestic duties. But Gemma was herself of too quick and ardent a temperament to suffer coldness or indifference in her husband patiently. She has been represented as a perfect modern Xantippe; but it does not seem necessary to suppose that she was a mere vulgar virago, to account for the little comfort which resulted from her marriage with Dante. Mistaken, as he probably was, in yielding to the representations of his relatives, it is hardly to be believed that a man of such refined feelings, and with so quick a perception of female excellence, would have been persuaded to marry a woman who did not possess many of the attractions and accomplishments of her sex. All we can fairly gather from the account of their disputes is, that Gemma was jealous: but her jealousy had a very natural foundation, and seems, at first, to have resulted neither from pettishness nor weak suspicions, but from a feeling natural to every woman of great susceptibility and delicacy. Dante was not a being for the

* Vita Nuova.

female heart to regard with indifference. His noble soul was framed to be the receptacle of strong affection, and the nobler, the more susceptible the woman to whom he plighted his faith, the more anxious would she be to assure herself of his love.

But Gemma soon found that Dante's regards were not to be permanently won. His former love of retirement was now manifested in an impatience of society altogether. He was frequently abstracted in gloomy thought, and continued, as before his marriage, to compose sonnets and canzoni to the memory of Beatrice. This conduct produced incessant complaints on the part of Gemma, and her discontent prompted those thousand little annoyances, which her husband was, at no time, disposed to bear patiently. Boccaccio, who, more than any of his biographers, took pleasure in describing the misery which Dante thus suffered, has left an amusing picture of his present condition, as contrasted with his former one. "He, who before passed his hours in sacred study," says this eloquent eulogist, "and in holding communion with kings, emperors, princes, philosophers, and poets; and who could always sooth his sorrows by sympathising with those of others, was now, at the beck

of his new wife, obliged to associate with whomever she pleased; and, dragged from his own noble companions, to listen to the arguments of women, and, if he did not wish to increase his misery tenfold, not only to listen to them, but to praise them. He, who was accustomed, whenever he grew weary of the crowd, to retire into some solitary place, and there meditating, inquire what spirit moves the heavens, whence the living creatures of the earth draw their life, and what are the causes of things; or to meditate on some invention, or to compose something which should ensure him a life after death, in fame—He, who was formerly thus employed, was now not only hindered from contemplation, but, whenever his new wife pleased, was forced into the society of persons in nowise disposed to such pursuits:—and yet more,—he who was accustomed to laugh, to complain, to sing, or sigh, just as passion, pleasure, or love prompted, now either dare not do it, or must give his wife an account of why he did it; and not only in greater matters, but with respect to every little sigh, telling her whence it rose, and for what it was intended; his cheerfulness being regarded by her as a sign of his loving some one else; his melancholy, as a proof that he hated her." "Oh! inconceivable

torture!" concludes the writer, "to have to live and converse, and then to grow old and die with such a jealous animal!"* It is but fair to add, that in another old Memoir of Dante, we find this opinion of Boccaccio very strongly controverted. Our author is there represented as not only loving society, and enjoying the conversation of learned men, but as being equally agreeable in the company of ladies: and the witty Florentine is confuted as to his opinion respecting the unfitness of the marriage state for men of letters, by the examples of Socrates and Aristotle, who was twice married, and of Marcus Tullius, and Cato, and Varro, and Seneca, all of whom were great philosophers and politicians, and enjoyed high offices in the state.† The same writer affirms, and after him Lodovico Dolce, and others, that the course of Dante's life, at this period, was regular, virtuous, and studious; and that he was hence deemed a fitting person for the important situations in the state to which he was called.

The testimony of Aretino, however, is scarcely sufficient to outweigh the general opinion respecting our author's unfortunate domestic quarrels. But the uneasiness he suffered from this cause was, it is probable, considerably alleviated by the active

* Origine Vita, &c. † Leonardo Aretino.

employment of his mind at this period in the affairs of the Republic. It is reported that he was sent by the Government on no less than fourteen embassies, and for the following purposes:— to the people of Sienna, for the regulation of the frontier —to the Perugians, to treat respecting the delivery of some Florentine prisoners—to Venice and Naples, to establish treaties of alliance—to the Marquis of Estè, to congratulate him on his nuptials, on which occasion he is said to have been at the head of the mission—to Genoa, respecting the frontier—a second time to the King of Naples, to obtain the liberation of Barducci, who had been condemned to death by that monarch—four times to the Pope, Boniface VIII.—twice to the King of Hungary—and once to the King of France. In all these embassies, except the last, he is reported to have had distinguished success: but it is matter of doubt how he could have been employed in so many, as his political career in Florence was of very brief continuance. The principal authority also on which the information rests is the testimony of an author* who lived two centuries after Dante, the circumstance being mentioned by no contemporary or very early writer.† But, though it is ques-

* Filelfo. † Tiraboschi.

tionable whether, in the few years which intervened between his becoming eligible for public offices and his exile, he could be engaged in so many missions, it is evident that he was by this time actively engaged in the affairs of the state, and rapidly rising in power and reputation.

But, unfortunately for the happiness of this great man, he lived at a period when the elements of civil discord were all at work, and the foundations of society were trembling with the first motions of a great political earthquake. The whole of Italy had been thrown into a state of violent excitement by the conflict between the Popes and the Emperors of Germany—a struggle which had its origin in ecclesiastical ambition, and its support in the factious disposition of the subjects of the two powers. It seems to be commonly the case, that when some general cause of agitation exists, private feuds also prevail to an alarming extent; and thus, at the time of which we are speaking, Florence was about to be scourged by faction and discord, till her best and wisest citizens fell under the calamity.

Among the noblest and most wealthy families in the state were the Cerchi and Donati, both powerful and jealous of their rank; and, while the latter could boast a more ancient origin, the former found

an equivalent advantage in their richer possessions. Thus placed on the same eminence, each family regarded any additional honour obtained by the other as an injury to itself; and their palaces being in the same quarter of the city, no circumstance could escape their mutual observation. The hatred which they at length conceived for each other led to acts of secret injury; and the Cerchi were believed to have robbed their rivals of an expected inheritance. To revenge this, Corso Donati, the chief of the family, and a man generally esteemed for his knightly valour, contrived, it is reported, on the same kind of evidence, the murder of several of the Cerchi by poison. Whether there was sufficient proof of either of these crimes for men, uninfluenced by passion, to act upon, is not, at this distance of time, to be determined; but the Cerchi, now regarding their neighbours as the most deadly foes, determined to invite a party of the citizens to espouse their cause. For this purpose they employed all the influence afforded by their wealth and station, and it was not long before they were surrounded by a body of partizans ready to proceed to any extremity in their support. The Donati, on the other hand, dreading the effects of this conspiracy against them, lost no time in raising a party of their

own, and all Florence soon rung with the clamours and bitter threatenings of these two great factions.

If, however, we may believe the celebrated historian of the Republic,* the evil was not yet so far advanced, but that a reconciliation might have been effected, had not fresh fuel been added to the flame. But it happened that the neighbouring city of Pistoia was in the same state of confusion as Florence, and also from domestic faction. The chief persons in that city were the Cancellieri, a numerous and powerful family, but divided in itself, and ready, on the first occasion, to break into open strife. The heads of this family were William and Bertaccio; and their sons, Lori and Geri, young men of about the same age, seem to have inherited their parents' readiness to convert the slightest circumstance into an occasion of quarrel. While amusing themselves one day at some game of chance, a dispute having arisen, they drew their swords, and Geri received a trifling wound. Lori, on his return home, informed his father of the occurrence, and, receiving a reproof for his impetuosity, was directed to proceed, without delay, to the house of his kinsman, and, by gentle apologies, obtain his forgiveness. The young man obey-

* Machiavelli.

ed his father's commands, but had no sooner commenced his excuse, than the enraged Bertaccio ordered his servants to seize him, and then taking him to a dresser, chopped off his hand, exclaiming, at the same time, "Return to thy father, and tell him that wounds are to be salved with steel, and not with words!" The father of Lori, roused to desperation by this savage act, delayed not to take arms; and one part of the citizens espousing one side, and another another, Pistoia was instantly involved in a civil war. Accident furnished the opposing factions with a name. The common ancestor of the Cancellieri had married two wives, one of which was named Bianca, and the branch of the family descended from her called themselves Bianchi, while the other took the appellation of the Neri, as the most distinct they could find.

Notwithstanding the ruinous dissensions which reigned within their own city, the Florentines became deeply interested in the situation of the Pistoians, and, with characteristic imprudence, determined to attempt the settlement of the quarrel between the Neri and Bianchi. The heads of the two parties were accordingly ordered to appear before the Republic, and settle their differences

under its guidance. The opposing Cancellieri obeyed the summons, entered the city with large retinues, and, as was to be expected, were severally received by the factious chiefs of Florence, who, by espousing the cause of either, obtained a powerful addition to their strength.

While preparations were thus busily carried on for rousing the whole territory to arms, Dante, now in the thirty-fifth year of his age, was elevated to the rank of Prior, the name given to the principal Florentine magistrates. This honour, the source, as he regarded it, of all his sorrows,* he received in the month of June 1300, and was no sooner installed in his important office, than he found himself necessitated to decide upon questions which involved the fate of both himself and his country.

The excesses daily committed by the hostile parties, threatened the entire destruction of the Commonwealth. Law had lost its control over the citizens, and every one seemed only intent either on pillaging his neighbour or gratifying some wish of revenge. In this situation of things, the wisest even among the magistrates were at a loss what counsels to pursue. Boniface VIII. who

* Leonardo Aretino.

had been made acquainted with the condition of the city, was inclined to regard the Cerchi as his inveterate enemies, and sending the Cardinal Portinensi as his ambassador to the Republic, he directed him to use all his influence for the support of the Donati. These circumstances becoming known at Florence, enraged the people so much that they drove Corso Donati and the other authors of the scandal out of the city; but the Pontiff's influence was not long affected by this event, and it was shortly after deemed necessary to apply to him for assistance. In the complete depression of authority which prevailed throughout the State, most of the magistrates lost all hope of being able to restore tranquillity by their unaided exertions. It was therefore argued by some, that to prevent the approaching destruction of the Republic, it would be politic to call in the aid of Charles of Anjou, then bearing arms for the Pope against the Emperor. As this counsel, however, had evidently its origin with the Donati, and would lead to consequences highly injurious to the opposite party, Dante, whose opinions had always been in favour of the latter, warmly and resolutely resisted it. But notwithstanding the consistency of his advice with the best interests of Florence; the

evident danger which its freedom would incur by the introduction of Charles, and the suspicious quarter from which the contrary opinion sprang, it was rejected by a large portion of his fellow citizens, and the Donati saw themselves sufficiently encouraged in their design to convene a meeting in the church of the Trinity, for the purpose of carrying their measures into execution. Dante immediately saw that it was only by the promptest and most determined measures, he, or his colleagues in the magistracy, could repress this conspiracy. Infusing, therefore, his own resolute spirit into the minds of his companions, they resolved to venture on a summary act of power, and forthwith condemned, and expelled from the city, the chief actors in the affair. Bold, however, as was the policy thus pursued, it availed little. The root of the evil had sent out too many fibres to be destroyed by a single stroke of the axe. Though the most audacious and turbulent of the Neri and Donati were driven away, numbers of their followers remained in the city, and their first astonishment at the discomfiture of their chiefs being abated, they re-commenced without any diminution of vigour, the former operations of their party.

Affairs continuing in this situation, Dante, it

appears, was deputed by his colleagues to plead their cause before the Pope, and use his utmost endeavours to prevent the interference of the French Prince. But the intrigues of the Neri and Donati baffled all his efforts. Boniface, though encouraging him to hope that his wishes would be attended to, secretly favoured his opponents, and at length agreed to send Charles of Anjou to Florence with the army under his command.

The magistrates were greatly alarmed when it was announced to them that Charles had arrived within a short distance of the city; only one measure was now practicable, and that was to receive him in his professed character of a mediator. The gates were accordingly thrown open, and on his entrance he was received and entertained in the most sumptuous manner. For a brief period his presence seemed to have all the good effect which the advocates of the measure had prognosticated. He had given a solemn promise that neither the liberties of the State should in any way be violated, nor the persons or property of the citizens injured; but the first public manifestations of respect were scarcely ended, when he began to show his real intentions. The very persons who had most hospitably entertained him were despoiled of

their possessions, either by extortion or direct pillage. Licentious violences were every day committed by his followers without fear of restraint or punishment; and under these auspices the citizens, disgracing their character of a free people, no longer reverenced either private right, or even the duties of friendship.*

But the evil did not stop here. A supreme magistrate was appointed by the ruling faction, and the Cerchi and Bianchi were devoted to ruin. After having suffered a variety of oppressions and minor grievances, six hundred of them were driven into exile, and taught to regard the children of the same soil with themselves as their bitterest enemies. Dante's absence at Rome did not save him from sharing in the condemnation of his party. He was an object of Charles's especial hatred, and was now to suffer whatever evil that weak and revengeful prince could inflict. Besides being banished for two years from his home, he was sentenced to pay a fine of eight thousand livres, and, in default of payment, to have his estates and goods confiscated. The alleged foundation for this severity in his case, was an accusation respecting his management of the public

* Dino Compagni; Cronica.

money, but the pure and honourable name he uniformly bore among all but his most desperate enemies, refuted the charge the moment the rage of faction allowed men to discern clearly the true character of their opponents.

The sentence above mentioned was pronounced on the twenty-seventh of January 1302, but on the tenth of March in the same year it was repeated, and with the addition that if, after being condemned for contumacy, he should be found in the territory of Florence, he was to be burnt alive. This circumstance, which serves so well to describe the character of the prevailing faction, it is Tiraboschi's boast to have first made known to the public, and he mentions that he received the information from the Bolognese senator Savioli, who, in looking over the archives of Florence, chanced to find the original copy of the decree fulminated against the poet and his associates.* Certainly a more terrible proof of the extreme violence to which political passion will lead men under pretence of justice, does not exist, and if we could even for a moment suppose that Dante was guilty of any of the alleged errors, we may rightly say, with the author above cited, that it is the only

* Storia, tom. v. lib. 3.

document in which such a punishment is threatened for such a crime.

While his enemies were thus successfully plotting his ruin, he was still at Rome, expecting every day that the Pope would return an answer more or less favourable to his party. It was with profound astonishment, therefore, he received tidings of the proceedings at Florence, which he saw good reason to believe had taken place at the instigation of Boniface.* Not deigning to conceal these suspicions, he haughtily withdrew from the Papal court, and determined on immediately seeking more certain information on the subject of his condemnation. For this purpose he proceeded to Sienna, where he obtained sufficient particulars of the transactions which had taken place, to warn him from approaching his native city.

From this period the life of Dante was that of an exile and a wanderer, and the earliest and most inquisitive of his biographers have in vain sought to satisfy themselves as to the exact course of his long and varied pilgrimage. It seems, however, that after leaving Sienna, he proceeded to Arezzo, in a small fortress pertaining to which city several of his friends and fellow citizens had formed their

* Pelli.

rendezvous. Inviting thither the various sufferers in the same cause who were scattered about the neighbburhood, to hold a consultation on future measures, the whole force of the exiled party assembled at Gorgonza. After long deliberation, they determined to establish a camp at Arezzo, and appointed a captain of their little army, who was to be assisted by twelve councillors, of whom Dante was one.*

Some degree of order and unity being thus insured, the leaders shortly after came to the resolution of attempting to re-enter their native city by force, and thus secure their restoration to the rights of which they had been unjustly deprived. Several Bolognese and Pistoians immediately joined them, and the army, amounting to sixteen hundred horse and nine thousand foot, began its march towards Florence. The movement was unexpected by the enemy, and the liveliest consternation prevailed throughout the city; but either the plan was ill-concerted, or the exiles were not sufficiently bold for the undertaking, as after a slight battle, fought about two miles distance from the walls of the city, they were totally discomfited, and though part of the troops had actually obtained an

* Aretino.

entrance into the town, such was the panic which prevailed, that the rival faction was almost instantaneously freed from the apprehensions which had been excited.

This event took place in the year 1304, and with its unfortunate issue Dante, who is supposed to have been present in the engagement, lost the little hope he had still cherished of being restored to his home. It is uncertain whether he remained any longer at Arezzo after the defeat of his party, or to what quarter of Italy he directed his steps. It is however known that while at Arezzo he formed a close intimacy with Bosone da Gubbio, a nobleman of great worth, and whose friendship was long serviceable to him in his misfortunes. This circumstance might prolong his stay in the neighbourhood, but it is more probable that he continued for some time wandering about without any fixed place of residence, unless Verona may claim the honour of having been the centre point of his journeys. In the year 1306, we again find traces of his footsteps, as he then took up his abode at Padua, and in the following year proceeded to Lunigiana, where he was hospitably received and entertained by the Marquis Morello Malaspina.*

* Purgat. viii. 122.

He thence went to Gubbio, and stayed some time with Bosone, for whom he had conceived a warm attachment. During his visit to this nobleman, he is said to have taught Greek to several of his friends, but it is a question strongly agitated by some of his most respectable biographers whether he was himself acquainted with that language. As far as I am able to form an opinion on the subject, I am strongly inclined to regard the arguments advanced in proof of his knowledge of Greek unanswerable, and for this reason especially—there was no department of learning which his active mind had not explored; no labour or difficulty in the pursuit of knowledge which he had not the intellectual courage to encounter; it is, therefore, highly probable that, being familiar as he was with the treasures that language was reported to possess, he would seek to acquire it; and that he would not condescend to imitate the weakest pretenders to learning, and speak familiarly of authors whose works he had never read.

Some doubt is felt whether he remained in Gubbio the whole of the period during which Bosone entertained him. A tradition exists which reports that either during this visit, or a later one, he re-

tired to the monastery of S. Croce in the neighbourhood, celebrated for the extreme wildness and desolate solitude of its situation, and that he there composed a large portion of his poem. The chamber even is still shown in which he is supposed to have indulged his love of meditation, and a marble bust with an inscription to his memory. The citizens of Gubbio also claim the honour for their town of its having been his asylum while employed on the Commedia, and on the wall of one of the houses some lines are still to be seen, or were so till lately, commemorating the circumstance. How much of his divine poem he wrote there is not known, but it is generally believed that he had composed about seven cantos before his exile from Florence, and that his wife having saved them from the populace when his house was pillaged, sent them to his friend Dino Compagni, who forwarded them to him while resident with the Marquis Malaspina.

After leaving his friend Bosone, it is supposed that he returned to Verona, to which city he seems to have been frequently attracted by the amiable and enlightened character of its princes Can Francesco and Alboino Scaligeri, who jointly exercised the sovereign authority. The former had the title of Il Grande on account of his ex-

ploits in a war against the Paduans, but both he and his brother were celebrated throughout Italy for the hospitality with which they succoured the distressed, their patronage of literature, and the splendour of their court.

With men of this character our poet was likely to find all the attention and honour which he merited; and there is reason to believe that he was for some time induced to make their court his home. It is even said that he invited one of his sons to join him there, but the almost entire silence of early authors respecting his family prevents any certainty on this point; the only fact of the kind sufficiently well attested to be relied on is, that neither his wife nor children, except the one perhaps now mentioned, accompanied him during any part of his exile.

But however Dante could enjoy for a time the hospitable and enlightened society of the Scaligeri, he was unfitted, as well by the irritated state of his feelings as by the natural severity of his character, for remaining long contented with his residence amid proud and effeminate courtiers. A very slight occasion, therefore, was sufficient to awaken his ill-humour and disgust, and furnish him with a reason for retiring from scenes so ill-suited

to his harassed mind. It chanced one day that the Grande Can, while sporting with the court fool, laughingly asked his guest how it was that so many of the nobles had a much greater regard for the fool than for him? "Because," answered Dante, "they are by nature much more like him than me, and therefore very naturally prefer his society to mine."

Whether the Prince was really offended at this sarcasm of the poet, or the latter imagined that he discovered signs of coolness in his demeanour, is uncertain, but Dante no longer felt himself happy at Verona, and taking a friendly farewell of his protectors, for whom he cherished to the day of his death the most faithful regard, he once more set forth on his wanderings.

While he was thus passing from city to city, and depending on the capricious favour of princes for a temporary hospitality, the current of political events prognosticated a change, and he again saw a gleam of hope upon his long, melancholy path. Boniface had now been dead some years, and the present Pope was supposed to be far less virulent against the party of the exiles. It was not, however, on any opinion respecting the moderation of the Pontiff that Dante rested his hopes; the Em-

peror Albert dying in the May of the year 1308, left the Imperial crown to be contended for by Charles of Anjou and Henry Prince of Luxembourg. Should the prize fall to the former, it was very evident that the ruin of the Cerchi and their adherents would be decided beyond reversal; should Henry, on the contrary, succeed, they might fairly look for the most prosperous change in their circumstances.

This was not a season for inactivity, and the anxious mind of Dante appears to have been roused to the most energetic exertion. He had already more than once addressed letters to the people of Florence, claiming their consideration of his unjust persecution; he had also sent epistles to various princes and to the Roman Senate, requesting their support in his endeavour to gain a reversal of his sentence and that of his colleagues. He now repeated his appeals with tenfold force, urging the claims of the Duke of Luxembourg to the Imperial crown with astonishing vigour and courage; he also wrote to Henry himself exhorting him to persevere in his pursuit, and assuring him of the loyal affection with which he expected his elevation to the throne. The effect of this constant excitement of his mind was to make him be-

lieve that all his hopes of better times were now on the point of being realized, as he intimates towards the conclusion of the Commedia, which it is hence argued was finished about this time or a little later.* To be ready at the first warning or summons from the new Emperor, he took up his quarters in the little town of Toscanella, and from thence dispatched another letter to the same august personage. To his great joy the accession of Henry was at length proclaimed, and the imperial army was shortly after on its way to Florence. But he had placed his trust on a reed; the Emperor had neither sufficient at stake in the expedition, nor sufficient energy to pursue it if it had been otherwise; finding the city better defended than he had expected, he halted before he arrived within sight of the walls, and then drew off his army to pursue measures more within the compass of his designs. The last glimmering of hope was now fast expiring, and was totally extinguished the following year, 1313, by Henry's untimely death, which happened on the eleventh of April.

No one suffered more than Dante from this event, as no one, perhaps, had been more elevated

* Paradiso, can. 30. v. 133. Pelli. Tiraboschi.

with the prospect of better times, or done more to produce them. Besides the letters above alluded to, he wrote his famous treatise De Monarchia, to encourage the partizans of the Emperor and make converts to his cause. But these labours produced no other effect than a third condemnation of the ill-starred author, who is supposed shortly after the death of Henry to have left Italy for some time.

Most accounts of Dante mention his having passed a short period of his exile in Paris; by some writers* the visit is dated earlier, but it is generally believed that it took place at the time of which we are now speaking. The French capital, in the thirteenth century, was the resort of the profoundest scholars in Europe, and its university was celebrated as the first seat of theological learning and philosophy. The period that our poet spent there was not unoccupied. By the study of his whole life he was qualified for treating the abstrusest subjects with which the subtle literature of that scholastic age was conversant; and as public disputations were then common in all the universities of Europe, he supported, it is said, several theses on subjects connected with theology and logic.

How long he remained at Paris is unknown, as

* Boccaccio, Filelfo.

is also the place of his sojourn immediately on his return to Italy. Verona, however, is supposed to have been, as in former years, the centre of his wanderings; and this idea is in some measure confirmed by the statement that he held a public disputation there in 1320, in the church of St. Helen, on the elements of earth and water, his supposed thesis respecting which was published at Venice in the early part of the sixteenth century, but the authenticity of this work has been disputed.*

We now approach the period when the wanderings of Dante were to cease. In the same year in which he is reported to have disputed at Verona, he removed to Ravenna, the lordship of Guido Novello da Polenta, a nobleman of singular liberality, and the father of the unfortunate Francesca di Rimini.† The fame of our poet was already widely spread; the share he had taken in public affairs recommended him to many, his long exile acquired him the sympathy of more, and the noble talents he had exhibited made him admired and respected by all but his fierce and implacable fellow-citizens. The generous and accomplished Guido felt himself honoured by the presence of such a man in his court; his fondness, also, for the pursuits which employed his guest,

* Tiraboschi. † Inferno, can. v. v. 73.

made him seek his companionship; and the intimacy thus produced and cemented, and in little danger of being disturbed by caprice on either side, was productive of good to both. Guido possessed the society of the greatest man Italy had produced, and Dante, after a life of wandering and unceasing anxiety, enjoyed towards its termination a brief period of repose.

It is also not unlikely that the toils and constant excitement, which the latter so long suffered, had produced that complete weariness of feeling which at last bends the proudest and most active spirits to wish for repose. He would thus be better fitted for receiving and returning the friendship of his protector, and for finding undisturbed satisfaction in the studies and pursuits to which he now seems to have devoted himself. The Commedia had probably been completed some time, and most, if not all the minor poems on which his fame is established. The Muse, however, was still his solace; but now that his passions were calmed, and his thoughts more under the control of temperate reason than impelled by his impetuous genius, he was satisfied with employing his skill simply in versifying, and poetical paraphrases of the seven penetential Psalms, the Credo, together with the

Pater Noster and Ave, remain as monuments both of his piety and his love of the art which had soothed so many hours of his life.

But the curtain was not yet dropped on his public career. His friend and protector was at war with the Venetians, and the contest was likely to prove injurious to the tranquillity of his State. In order to avert the evil, he determined on opening negotiations with the haughty Republicans, and, if possible, to procure peace. No one could be better qualified, either by talents or experience, for conducting such a business than his guest, and Dante was accordingly sent to Venice. It is not to be doubted that he employed in the task every means which his knowledge of public affairs afforded; but all his efforts failed: such was the decided opposition of the Venetians to an accommodation with Ravenna, that they would not even admit the ambassador to an audience, and he was obliged to return without having succeeded in any of the objects of his mission. Guido was too sincerely attached to him to suffer the ill success of his journey to interfere with their friendship; but the susceptible mind of Dante was deeply wounded in having failed to effect the purpose which his generous benefactor had hoped to

secure by his exertions. The kindest assurances, the tenderest and most unremitting endeavours to remove the impression from his feelings proved unsuccessful. From this period an unconquerable sadness oppressed his spirits, and his weak frame being unable to support its pressure, he died in the month of September, in the year 1321, and on the day devoted by the Church of Rome to the honour of the holy cross.

Guido and all Ravenna lamented the death of Dante with expressions of the deepest sorrow. Shortly before his decease he had clothed himself in the habit of the Franciscans, but the Prince, immediately after his death, removed the humble friar's mantle and clad him in the garments which, according to the ideas of the age, formed the proper dress of poets. His funeral was attended by the whole population of the town, and after the burial, which took place in the Franciscan church, Guido pronounced an oration in which he highly extolled the virtues and splendid genius of the deceased. Nor would his testimony of veneration have ended here; he had formed the resolution of erecting a noble monument over the tomb of his friend, but he was soon after driven into exile himself, and it was reserved for the cele-

brated Bembo to render that honour to the poet's memory.

The family of Dante consisted of five sons and a daughter, named Beatrice, after his beloved mistress. Three of the former died young; the two others became respectable literary characters, and wrote commentaries on their father's Commedia. About forty years after the sentence had been passed, which confiscated the property of their house, it was restored by the chiefs of the Republic; and the feeling which instigated this act of justice to the survivors extended to the memory of the poet himself. As anxious now to claim him for their own, as they were a few years before to load him with obloquy and misery, they desired to bring his remains to Florence, and proposed to raise a splendid mausoleum for their reception. But the people of Ravenna firmly resisted all their applications; and Michael Angelo himself, backed by the authority and requests of the Pope, in vain renewed them some centuries after.

The Florentines, however, found a nobler method of doing honour to their great and persecuted countryman. His poems, in a few years, had become celebrated throughout Italy; and, even before the invention of printing, copies were to be

found in all the principal towns, and in the hands of every man of letters. To show their estimation for these works, and, at the same time, remove some of the shame the city suffered from the fate of their author, a public lecture was instituted by the magistrates, the object of which was to illustrate the sublime mysteries of the Commedia. The first lecturer appointed was Boccaccio, who continued in the office till his death: but this occurring about two years after, his Commentary extended no farther than the sixteenth book of the Inferno. Nothing can more strongly indicate the feeling which prevailed respecting the poem, than the circumstance that the celebrated Professor began his course on a Sunday, and in a church,—that of St. Stephen. After Boccaccio's death, the chair was successively occupied by the most learned men of Florence; and the example of that city was speedily followed by Bologna, Pisa, Venice, and other towns, in all of which professorships were endowed for the illustration of the Commedia.

The person of Dante, according to the descriptions of contemporary writers, and the various medals and paintings which have multiplied his likeness, was strikingly representative of his intellectual character. The expression of his visage,

which was long and deeply embrowned, was grave and severe: his eyes were large and penetrating; his nose aquiline; his under lip advanced beyond the upper; and the hair, both of his head and beard, thick, black, and crisp. In stature he was not above the middle size, and, as his years advanced, he was somewhat bowed by infirmity: but his appearance was always haughty and dignified, and his slow step and composed countenance impressed all who saw him with respect. With regard to his general character, its principal features were great ardour in whatever he undertook, unrestrained freedom in both acting and speaking according to his own ideas of right; great warmth in his attachments, and an impatience of flattery or dissimulation. His sentiments were pure, and the natural temper of his mind inclined to devotion. For the most part, his life seems to have corresponded to his principles; but the discontent which existed between him and his wife, and the consequent unsettled state of his affections, led him, during some period of his exile, into an illicit connexion. We have scarcely, indeed, any opportunity of judging correctly of his character as a father and husband. He certainly stands open to the accusation of having thrown all the asperity of his feelings

into his domestic relations, and of having deserted or neglected them through a large portion of his life. But, from the time of his being elected Prior to the day of his death, he seems to have been wholly occupied with politics, or with the studies which either abstracted him from the world, or ministered nourishment to the bitter and passionate emotions with which he regarded his fate. He was hence borne along by a torrent which swept all milder sympathies and regards from his bosom—the only channel by which any tender feeling could insinuate itself into his heart was memory: but, with the recollections of his native city, and the scenes of his youth, were too intimately blended the deep-seated resentment of the injured citizen; and thus, both in his life and poetry, the gentler feelings of his nature cast only rare and fitful gleams over the prevailing gloom.

Of his public conduct, it does not appear difficult to form a general opinion, and that opinion is favourable to his fame, both as a man and a magistrate. In the first troubles of the State, he acted with a courage and decision which, with better means of support, might have saved the country from years of misery. During his residence in the courts of many foreign Princes, he preserved his

independence with inflexible firmness; and, in his most resentful rebukes of the ruling party, manifested with what a deep and undying affection he regarded Florence herself. Some of his actions, it is true, may be accused of indicating more of private indignation and passion than are consistent with the self-forgetfulness and firmness of patriotism. The proposed attack from Arezzo, and his eager invitation of the Emperor Henry savour of this error. But, that he all along acted according to the dictates of his conscience—that he never allowed himself to violate what he considered his duty, or was consistent with the rights of the party he espoused, may be fairly believed from the earnestness and elevation of his sentiments, and the firmness, which honesty only, in such a mind, could beget, that appeared in all he did or undertook.

Such was the father of Italian literature: and, in turning to the brief consideration of his works, it may be remarked, that never did the stream of a poet's genius more clearly reflect his character, in all its proportions of light and shade, or good and evil, than Dante's. Did neither memoir, nor bust, nor painting exist, from which to draw his character, the impression left by the perusal of the Commedia would bring him before us in all the melan-

choly and severe majesty of his mind and appearance. We should know how much he had suffered, and how deeply he had felt; that he had been both a lover and a patriot, such as the world rarely sees, and in both characters had had his hopes blighted in the very flower of his age: for, with all the sublimity and learning of his muse, his personal experience and feelings are the groundwork of her operations, and, in her most successful efforts, her materials.

No author, ancient or modern, has had a greater number of critics and commentators than Dante. Before a century after his death, professorships were instituted, as has been said, in all parts of Italy for the explanation of the Commedia; and the most ingenious wits, as well as the profoundest scholars, exercised their talents upon its pages. In point of criticism, or as simply regards the poetical enjoyment of this sublime poem, I willingly join in the opinion, now pretty general, that they are useless and burdensome. But it ought not to be forgotten that the Commedia of Dante has another merit besides that which belongs to it intrinsically as a magnificent production of genius—it is one of the very best mediums we possess for observing the character of the age in which it was produced

—the opinions which then prevailed on matters both political and religious—the ruling passions of society, and the motives which spurred the most influential of its members into action. Many of the commentaries consequently on the Commedia are valuable dissertations on points of contemporary history; and, even when they deal least in facts, and run wild, as far as regards the just purposes of criticism, give us a very clear idea of the actual state of learning and religion, and what degree of influence they exercised on the state of the community at large. Though my limits, therefore, and the nature of the present work, prevent my having any concern with the multifarious commentators on Dante, I may without impropriety mention them as highly valuable in respect to the objects above alluded to: and, while considering them as even worse than useless to the enjoyment of the poet's sublime imaginings, regard them in a much more favourable light when viewed in connexion with the history of the periods when they appeared.

So far as we are simply concerned with estimating the genius of Dante, or reading his poem with a view to its genuine beauties as a poem, we require little assistance from commentators—scarcely any more, in fact, than what may be obtained

from the arguments prefixed to the several cantos, and a general acquaintance with the history of the age.

With respect to the origin of the plan on which the poet has constructed his remarkable edifice, many conjectures have been formed, but nothing is known for certainty on the subject. An opinion prevailed pretty generally for some time that he derived it from seeing a dramatic spectacle at Florence, which was got up to celebrate the arrival of the Pope's legate in that city. In the true spirit of the old Mysteries, this drama was to represent the infernal regions with characters proper to the scene, and to carry the design the better into effect, the representation took place on a wooden bridge over the Arno: but in the midst of the proceedings, the bridge gave way beneath the congregated multitudes, and numbers of persons perished in the stream. It is not improbable that such an awful scene, in which the work of a wild and superstitious imagination was so fearfully confounded with reality, would make a deep impression on the mind of a poet; but this event, it appears, did not take place till two years after the commencement of Dante's exile, and therefore could not have been witnessed by him. Another

supposition attributes the plan of his poem to some old romances, well known in Italy at that time, as one entitled "Il Meschino," and another "Songe, ou Voyage de l'Enfer," in which an account is given of a descent into the regions of punishment. These and other similar theories, M. Ginguené rejects for one of his own, which it is very surprising he considers should have escaped the attention of various critics. The conjecture is ingenious, and more worthy, perhaps, of attention than those beforementioned. According to this elegant writer, the foundation of Dante's Commedia is the Tesoretto of his master Brunetto. That the reader may the better understand how much credit is due to this idea, I give the argument in M. Ginguené's own words. "I am astonished," says he, "that no person has hitherto discovered another origin, not indeed for the particular fiction of the *Inferno*, but for the general fiction, which is, as it were, the poetic machinery of the whole work." "Brunetto Latini," continues he, "was a Guelf, and relates that after the defeat and exile of the Ghibelins, the Republic of Florence sent him ambassador to the King of Spain. Having finished the business of his mission, he returned by way of Navarre, but learnt on the road that after new disturbances, the

Guelfs had been banished in their turn. The grief which this intelligence occasioned him was so strong, that he lost his way, and found himself wandering in a forest. When he came to himself, he was at the foot of some mountains, where he saw an innumerable troop of animals of every kind, men, women, beasts, serpents, birds, and fishes.... he sees them successively begin and end, engender and die, according to the command of a female, who appears sometimes to touch the heavens which serve as a veil; sometimes to spread herself upon the earth, so that she seems to hold the whole world in her arms. He ventures to present himself before her, and to inquire who she is—it is Nature. She tells him that she commands all beings, but that she herself obeys the God who created them, and that she only transmits and executes his intentions. She then unfolds to him the mysteries of Creation and reproduction, passes to the fall of the angels, and to that of man, the source of all the evils which have come upon the human race; she draws from thence some moral considerations and rules of conduct: she at length quits the traveller after having shown him the right path, the forest into which he must enter, and the route which he ought thence to pursue: in the one

he was to find Philosophy, and the Virtues her sisters; in the other the Vices which are contrary to them; in a third, the God of Love with his court, his attributes, and his arms. Nature disappears; Brunetto pursues his journey, and finds all that she had indicated. In the changeable and moving dwelling of Love he meets Ovid, who collects the laws of the Gods, and puts them into verse. He converses with him for some minutes, and is about to quit the place, when he finds himself restrained in spite of his efforts to depart, and would never have been able to disengage himself, but for the timely aid of Ovid. As the poem proceeds, he meets Ptolemy the ancient astronomer, who also instructs him."

Here are certainly, as M. Ginguené observes, a vision, wanderings in a forest, an ideal picture of virtues and vices, and a rencontre with an ancient Latin poet and a philosopher, who unfold the respective objects of their study. There is also a possible foundation for the three ideas of Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell; but I confess I do not see the necessity of searching for the origin of Dante's plan either in the Tesoretto of his master, in the old French romances, or in the dramatic representation on the Arno, and for this reason, that as Dante had the same materials out of which to form

his fable, as the authors of the Tesoretto, the romances, and the mystery, it was not necessary for him to have recourse to the inventions of far inferior minds. Had he lived five or six hundred years posterior to the productions above mentioned, and written his poem at a period when the customs and religious dogmas with which they are concerned had long ceased to exist, he might have found them useful to aid his fancy, and assist him in forming a plan which required the skill of an antiquary as well as the genius of a poet. But Dante lived at a period when scholars were peculiarly conversant with the mysteries of religion—when they formed almost the sole subject of their writings; and learned men might be divided into two classes, those who wedded theology to the philosophy of Aristotle, and those who blended it with the inventions of the poets.

Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, had been long made familiar to men's thoughts, as the three separate states in which each particular vice or virtue would meet with its fitting reward; nor had the doctrines on which this representation is founded been left to influence the minds of the people by the simple force of truth; they had been taught for ages by signs and emblems, and believers had been made to learn rather by the medium of their

senses, than the silent arguments of the conscience, 'accusing or excusing itself,' what are the rewards or punishments of the future world. The Commedia, like other sublime works of genius, embodied the vague but universal spirit of the times when it was written. Its foundations were the popular creed of all Christendom; its supports the deep reasonings and curious subtleties of countless theologians; and the scenes it represents, such as had long formed the dreams of many a monk on Vallambrosa, and perhaps entered into the sermons of every preacher in Europe. A man, therefore, of much less genius than Dante might have composed a work similar in mere plan and construction to the Commedia. The materials were at hand; and as for the ground-work, the existence of romances in which a similar journey through the regions of spirits is related, shows that, by possessing a moderate degree of talent, a writer might easily avoid the mere plagiarism of a plan, by modelling the popular opinion on the subject according to his purpose. At any rate, there seems little reason for believing that an author like Dante could find himself at all necessitated to borrow his design from any one writer or the other, when he had every facility for being original.

But it is not in the design, which is far more theological than poetical, that Dante's genius appears in its splendour. The mysterious path which he pursued, had been in a manner traced out for him, and any disciple of Duns Scotus, or Thomas Aquinas, could have led him through the gloomy regions as well as Virgil. It is not till he have fairly entered upon his track that he manifests the sovereign power of his mind. We begin our journey with him as if in company with a cowled ecclesiastic, or metaphysician; but as we proceed his voice and form seem to change, and as the darkness grows around us, he becomes greater and mightier, till when we enter the deep and woody way, and stand before the gate of the doleful city, we feel as he himself felt when his great master appeared before him in the solemn stillness of his valley of visions, and amid the forms that made even the air seem to tremble.

The distinguishing characteristic of Dante's poetry, though far from wanting in occasional passages of exquisite tenderness and beauty, is its sublimity, and hence by general consent the Inferno is placed at an almost immeasurable distance above the other two parts of the Commedia, which required a milder and more brilliant fancy. In

respect to sublimity, Dante has but one superior, our own Milton. The scenes he depicts have the terrible distinctness of places beheld in a vivid dream; the language of his personages makes an equally powerful impression on the mind — it is short, pointed, and abrupt, and such as we might expect to hear from miserable beings dreading the fiery lash of pursuing demons, but retaining their sense of human sympathy. The same power appears in his comparisons as in the main subjects of the description. Over the images drawn from natural objects, or real occurrences, he flings the gloom, or the lurid light of his subterranean caverns, rendering at the same time the abodes of condemned spirits the more terrible by the contrast of things still earthly and embodied. This sublimity, it is true, is far from being constantly sustained, and the verse not unfrequently falls off into a style as cold and harsh as it is obscure and unaffecting. But in the first place, it was not possible that he should be always alike elevated; and in the next, both the object of his poem, the learning which filled his mind, and the literary taste of the age, would lead him into most of the faults which disfigure the Commedia in the eye of a modern reader.

It may, however, be questioned whether the sublimity of Dante is ever of that high and moral species which, it may be said, affects the soul as well as the imagination, and diffuses over it that solemn tranquillity of thought which gives at the same time the highest moral as well as intellectual delight. The scenes and objects which he describes are clear and palpable; their very sublimity depends on their distinctness, and the emotions produced are akin to what they would be were the representation real; but it is not the most distinct view of a terrible object which excites the greatest terror; and deep and powerful, therefore, as is the impression made by Dante's images, it is inferior to that which is felt in the perusal of the Paradise Lost. Milton described scenes of physical torture and misery; we see the condemned writhing beneath the infliction; the fiery soil is palpable; the darkness visible; the raging of the hail and lightning 'shot after them in storm' is audible; but the sensible perception of these things is overpowered by the sublimer spiritual feeling which the moral grandeur of his sentiments never fails to inspire. Dante equalled Milton in the one respect, but not in the other, which gave to the English bard a diviner character than was ever attained by any other mortal poet.

Of Dante's other works, it may, perhaps, be correctly said, that had he not left the Commedia, he would still have been the first poet of his time.* This is, however, no great praise; and, had he not written the Inferno, he would probably have been as unknown to posterity in general as the rest of his contemporaries. The inferior productions of his pen are, the Vita Nuova, alluded to in the Memoir, and which is only interesting from its serving to show the state of the writer's mind at a particular period of his life;—a volume of Sonnets and Canzoni, somewhat more elevated in sentiment and more polished in style than those of other authors of the same age, but full of cold, metaphysical conceits, and even failing to affect the feelings, where the ideas are poetical, by the mechanical construction of the stanzas. One of the Canzoni, for example, is divided into five strophes, each of which is devoted to the description of some part of his mistress' person; and thus the poet gives us a regular anatomical picture, first of her hair, then of her mouth, her neck, nose, arms, hands, fingers, and so on. There is an Ode, however, written during his exile, and when his genius was arriving too near maturity to be weakened by affectation, which is justly admired

for the pathos of its sentiments. It describes Justice, Generosity, and Temperance, as seeking refuge in a heart of which Love is the constant master, and when they relate how they have been driven from their homes, the poet pathetically exclaims that he will never complain at his own exile, since he shares it with such companions. The Penitential Psalms, &c. mentioned above, are so greatly inferior to the rest of his works, that it has been much doubted whether they are rightly attributed to his pen: so far, however, as the doubt depends on the indifference of the style, it is not sufficiently strong to make us reject them from his works. There are several passages in the "Commedia" as prosaic; and, in paraphrasing a creed, or passages of Scripture, a man like Dante might have many scruples as to adorning them with splendid images.

His other works are the "Convivio," a learned commentary on three of his own Canzoni, and fully as obscure and fatiguing as any that ever appeared on the "Commedia." A Treatise, "De Monarchia," written to prove the independence of the civil power, when the Emperor Henry gave him reason to hope that the Roman Pontiff would be no longer suffered to tyrannize over states and their rulers. Considering the age when this work was written,

it is certainly an astonishing production, and deserves immortality, both for the strength and freedom of the arguments. Pope John the Twenty-Second had it publicly burnt twenty years after the death of Dante. The last production to be mentioned is his work "De Vulgari Eloquentia," in which he examines the nature of language in general, and next that of the Italian in particular: he intended to have written four books on the subject, but lived to complete only two; and the treatise having been translated into Italian about two centuries after, a violent controversy was raised as to its authenticity.

The Life of Petrarch.

Petrarch.

The subject of the present memoir, like that of the preceding, was the descendant of an ancient Florentine family.* His father, Pietro Petracco, or Petraccolo, was a respectable notary, but having taken part in the factions which agitated Florence he was expelled at the same time that Dante suffered sentence of condemnation, and retired with his wife, Eletta Canigiani, to Arezzo. Here he shared in the counsels and resolutions of the other partisans of the Neri, and when the descent was made upon Florence on the twentieth of July, 1304, he bore arms in the little troop which

* Baldelli. Abbé de Sade. Manetti.

marched to attempt the recovery of their rights. On the very night that this useless expedition was undertaken, Eletta gave birth to Francesco, but not without danger of losing her life, which her attendants for some time considered terminated.

The sentence passed on Petracco not being extended to his wife, she was permitted to take up her residence on an estate belonging to her husband at Ancisa, in the valley of the Arno, about fifteen miles distant from the capital. Francesco, when his mother retired to this place, was about seven months old, and in their journey narrowly escaped drowning, the man who carried him, as they crossed the river, being nearly precipitated into the stream by the fall of his horse. During the seven years which Eletta passed at Ancisa her husband continued to visit her for short periods, but with the utmost secrecy and caution, the rest of his time being spent in travelling from place to place, with the hope of discovering some retreat in which he might exercise his profession with security. At length, finding that no change was likely to occur in the affairs of the Republic, he resolved to remove with his wife and little family,

now consisting of Francesco and two younger sons, to Avignon, at that time the capital of the Roman see.

On arriving in that city, Petracco found numbers of his countrymen there who, like him, had been driven from Italy by civil faction. Among the few with whom he felt any inclination to form an acquaintance was a Genoese, named Settimo, whose son, Gui Settimo, became the earliest associate, and remained through life one of the most attached of Petrarch's friends. The two families, thus united by similarity of fortune and personal attachment, finding Avignon too expensive a place of residence determined to remove to Carpentras, a small town in the neighbourhood. Here Petrarch was placed under the tuition of Convennole, a schoolmaster from Pisa, possessing some learning and ability, but little judgment or talent for teaching.* Francesco, however, made rapid progress in learning; and the old man was accustomed to say, that of the many and noble persons he had had for his pupils he loved Petrarch above all. With this master he had been about five years when his father and some friends proposed making a visit

* Filippo Villani.

to Vaucluse, and taking the young scholar with them. His mother could with difficulty be persuaded to suffer his going on this excursion, but overcome by their intreaties she at last consented, and he no sooner beheld the celebrated fountain, concealed amid the wildest and most picturesque solitudes, than he exclaimed, "How beautiful is this spot! I would give whole cities, did I possess them, to purchase it!"

His singular talents for learning were early shown by the avidity with which he sought out some of the works of Cicero which formed part of his father's library. These he read and enjoyed, while other boys of the same age could hardly be made to comprehend the meaning of Æsop; and so great a progress had he made by the time he was fourteen, that his father determined on sending him to Montpellier to commence his studies in the civil law. But his mind had become too deeply imbued with the love of the classics to relish the dry commentaries on Justinian; and during the three years he passed at Montpellier he advanced so slowly in the knowledge requisite to his future profession, that his father removed him to Bologna, where he hoped the

superior talents of the professors would urge him to greater diligence. The hope, however, was vain; Petrarch, though using every endeavour to obey the wishes of his father, whom he tenderly loved, could neither overcome his repugnance to the law, nor resist the fascinations of poetry and eloquence. Virgil and Cicero were his constant companions, and every day obtained greater influence over his mind. Petracco, suspecting that this was the cause of the little improvement evident in his legal accomplishments, went one day unexpectedly to Bologna, and found him in full enjoyment of his favourite authors, the manuscripts of which were spread on his table. This was too much for the good man's patience, and seizing the precious scrolls he cast them both into the fire. The horror of Francesco was indescribable, but as soon as he could recover breath he set up such piteous lamentations that his father, half frightened and half moved with pity, snatched the manuscripts from the flames, and again gave them to his son, kindly saying, that he must read Virgil for his comfort, and Cicero as an excitement to pursue the study of the law with more ardour.

The death of Petracco relieved his son from the

obligation, imposed by his requests, to follow a profession so hateful to his mind. After, therefore, having spent three years at Montpellier and four at Bologna* without profit, he returned to Avignon, where the death of his mother shortly after filled him with the deepest affliction. His brother Gerard, who had studied with him at Bologna, was now his sole surviving relative and chief companion. Their first care, after the death of their parents, was to collect what little property they had left; but the persons in whose trust it was placed diminished it so much by their dishonesty, that, having no other resource but the Church, they both embraced the ecclesiastical profession.

Still, however, they had few means for supporting themselves in luxury; but, influenced by a love of gallantry and the desire of being esteemed the most accomplished men in Avignon, they generally appeared dressed in the most fashionable costume, and frequented the society most esteemed for its selectness and elegance. Petrarch reminded his brother, some time after they had lost their taste for such a course of life, how carefully they were accustomed to consult their looking-glass in arrang-

* Baldelli.

ing their habits, the least spot on which, or the rumple of a fold, would have been a matter of serious concern; how they wore shoes, so tight, that it was martyrdom to walk in them; and how carefully they curled their hair, losing their sleep even to make it lie gracefully.* But while thus engaged in obeying the absolute laws of fashion, he was neither idle nor corrupt; and his benevolence to his aged master, Convennole, deserves to be recorded in every narrative of his life. The poor old grammarian, after spending near seventy years of his existence in teaching rhetoric, was now shivering on the brink of the grave in almost abject poverty. Petrarch alone supplied him with the comforts necessary to his infirmities; his purse was always open to him as long as any thing remained in it, and when all was spent and the old man wanted more, he gave him his books to pledge, which was the greater instance of benevolence, as he valued them above every thing in the world, and lost several through the negligence of Convennole; among others, a copy of Cicero's treatise on glory, which has been lamented by every succeeding generation of scholars. Nor was he less studious than benevolent at this period. Though

* Epistolæ. Var. 27.

spending much of his time either in adorning his person or in the pleasures of society, he laboured assiduously during the remaining hours, and it was in some measure owing to the indefatigable perseverance with which he now cultivated the classics that the following age advanced so rapidly in knowledge and refinement. Manuscripts of the best authors were rarely to be met with, and of some the existence was doubtful. Petrarch, deterred by no difficulty, and having sufficient patience to support his enthusiasm, explored every corner where a copy of any of the classics might by possibility be concealed. In many instances he was successful, and his collection soon became considerable; while the numerous copies which he caused to be made, and the influence of his example, gave a general and permanent value to his exertions.

This passion for learning when somewhat chilled, was revived by the exhortations he received from John of Florence, a distinguished scholar of the time, and resident in Avignon as apostolic secretary. The advice of this venerable man awakened reflection in the heart of Petrarch; he examined the state of his mind, and formed serious resolutions to fill it with the richest treasures that could be derived from

study. In speaking of his opinions at this period, he says that he loved truth but not sects. "I am sometimes," he exclaims, "a Peripatetian, at others a Stoic, then an Academician, and then neither the one nor the other; but I am at all times a Christian. To be a philosopher is to love wisdom; but the true wisdom is Jesus Christ. Let us read historians, poets, philosophers, but let us have always in our hearts the gospel of Christ, in which we may find both wisdom and happiness."

The leisure he so earnestly sighed for, to put the intentions he had formed in practice, was scarcely to be enjoyed with his present scanty means of support, and he gladly accepted the offer of Giacomo Colonna to take him under his protection. This excellent and accomplished man had been his fellow-student at Bologna, and had often remarked the intellectual expression of his countenance; but the character which Petrarch had now acquired for elegance of manners and knowledge of polite literature, recommended him more particularly to his notice, and they speedily saw in each other so much similarity of tastes and temper that their friendship promised to be as lasting as profitable. A branch of the Colonna family, the noblest and most ancient in Italy, had

for some time been resident at Avignon, and proud of his new acquaintance, Giacomo lost no time in introducing him to his relatives, whom he had the pleasure to see as much delighted with him as he was himself. Thus freed from the embarrassments which threatened him, Petrarch continued his studies with new vigour and additional success.

Till he reached his twenty-third year, his life was undisturbed by any passion but that of literary ambition, or his hatred of the vices and follies which characterized the age, and more especially the place of his present residence; but he was now to follow the steps of his great predecessor and countryman, and become a lover. It was on the sixth of April 1327, that he first beheld Laura, destined to receive so much glory from his genius, and to merit, perhaps, all the poetical fame she has enjoyed for the direction she gave his talents. The church of St. Claire, in Avignon, was the place of this meeting, both having been drawn thither by the ceremonies of the church, it being Good Friday, or the Monday of Passion-week. Laura was then in the twentieth year of her age and endowed with all the charms of her sex.

Petrarch has enabled us to picture the features and person of his mistress, but neither he, nor any of his contemporaries, left sufficient evidence respecting her family or connexions, to prevent their being long the subject of controversy. Without entering into the details of these disputes it is sufficient to state that she was the daughter of Audibert de Noves; that both her own family and that of her husband were among the most noble in Avignon, and that her mother, who had been left a widow about the year 1320, persuaded her to marry, at a very early age, Ugo di Sade, and thus avoid the many suitors whom her beauty and large dowry were likely to attract.*

The husband of Laura was few years older than herself, but is generally represented as of a morose and unaffectionate disposition. The passion, however, which Petrarch had conceived for her was met with the coldness and reserve which became her condition. His prayers and addresses, whether uttered in the real language of youthful ardour, or the figurative eloquence of poetry, obtained him no encouragement from the object of his attentions; and the jealousy of Ugo, who is described as not at all wanting in that ungracious quality, was not

* Abbé de Sade.

near so formidable to the lover's hopes as the pure and serene virtue of his wife. Thus convinced, from the earliest period of his attachment, that Laura must be to him but as a beautiful vision of the imagination, he learned by degrees to content himself with casually meeting her on the promenades and in other places of public assembly, his sole delight consisting in describing her charms, and in developing in verse the mysteries of his passion.

The letters, in which he is supposed to have given a more particular account of the manner in which he passed his life, while under the first influences of love, he destroyed; and we are thus left without any means of determining what events occurred between his meeting Laura in April 1327, to his leaving Avignon in 1330. The loss, however, is probably not a great one. The circumstances of a young man's life, occupied with a fruitless passion one day, and with books another, are seldom very interesting: and, from a letter which Cino of Pistoia wrote to him about this period, it would seem that he was making as little progress in the career of ambition as of love. "My dear Francis," says the good Professor, after speaking of Petrarch's unfortunate love of poetry, "I

have many times deplored your blindness. I have often prayed the Lord to lead you back to a more profitable course of life, or to destroy the recollection of you in my mind. I can never think of you, and think of you I do night and day, without repenting that I ever loved you so much. In one word, you must be yourself again, and change your manner of living, or I hope I shall never again hear of a man so unworthy of having been my pupil. I had prepared a solemn discourse for your promotion to the degree of doctor. I wished to do you an honour which I had never rendered to any one else,—but the gods have not heard my vows: your studies and my labours have been all in vain. What efforts, what toil, are all lost! How can you suffer yourself to be deceived by false appearances? What can the family to whom you trust procure you, although it be very illustrious and very noble? Who will repay you for that which you will lose? Might you not have lived honourably at Avignon, in the court of the Pope, with the title of Jurisconsult? But I have, perhaps, said too much. I fear my friendship has carried me too far. If you retain any of your former sentiments of respect for your master, give these counsels such a place in your heart, as his friendship merits. May the

Lord induce you to return to the studies which you have forsaken!' This would be a great consolation to me, and a great happiness to you."

But Petrarch conceived that, notwithstanding the affectionate warnings of Cino, he should be better providing for his future as well as present respectability by continuing to cultivate the friendship of the Colonni, than by the study of the law. When his friend and patron, therefore, Giacomo Colonna, went to take possession of his new Bishopric of Lombes, a little, romantic town, not far from the Pyrenees, he determined on accompanying him thither. In this retreat they passed the summer, employing themselves in study and converse, and returning to Avignon well pleased with their short freedom from its turmoils and dissipation.'

Immediately on their return, Petrarch was introduced by his friend the Bishop, to the Cardinal Giovanni Colonna, a man as remarkable for his plain and simple habits as for his hospitality and liberal kindness to persons of talent. The genius and learning of our poet quickly rendered him agreeable to this noble churchman, and he was received as a constant inmate of his palace. Here he enjoyed the society, not only of the most distinguished men of Avignon, but of all the illustrious

strangers, among others, of the celebrated Richard of Bury, Ambassador from Edward III., who frequented the Pontifical court. To Stephen Colonna, the father of his patron, he owed his increasing admiration for Italy and its venerable capital; and, while conversing with this old patrician, his mind became inspired with the resolution to visit, as speedily as possible, and do all in his power to honour, the land of his nativity.

The esteem in which the character of Petrarch was held by the Cardinal may be understood from an anecdote, which he has himself related in one of his epistles. A great dispute having arisen between the persons attached to Giovanni, many of them took arms, and proceeded to acts of dangerous violence. To discover the immediate offenders in the quarrel, the Cardinal put all the members of his household to their oath, but when Petrarch came in his turn to declare his innocence, he closed the book, saying, "Oh! as for you, Petrarch, your word is sufficient!"

The passion he had conceived for Laura was not at all diminished by his journey to Lombes; and neither the conversation of his intelligent friends, the study of philosophy, nor the desire with which he was inspired to render himself

worthy of the favour he received, could divert his mind from its overpowering influence. Laura and poetry were the sole possessors of his heart; and, while the one was the object of his constant pursuit in society, the other employed all his hours of leisure and retirement. The sonnets, supposed to have been composed about this period, are not among the best productions of his muse; but such was the fame they acquired him, that he began to be regarded, both in France and Italy, as a poet of the highest promise.

Strong, however, as was the impression which love had made upon his mind, it had not destroyed the patriotic enthusiasm he nourished for his country. The political events which took place at this period, were such as to move the most indifferent spectator. In the year 1332, the King of Bohemia, in conjunction with the Pope, determined on the invasion of Italy, and Petrarch beheld with indignation the arrival of that monarch at Avignon, to consult on the measures necessary for the enterprize. At the beginning of 1333 the King entered Italy, and our poet, regarding his country as already enslaved, exclaimed, "Has not Italy still the same arms, the same weapons with which she conquered the universe? I tremble for my country.

Separated from her by the ocean, I see the storm which threatens her, and seems to expose her to certain shipwreck." To the great joy of the patriot, his fears proved vain, the invaders suffering defeat every step they advanced beyond the Alps.

Shortly after these occurrences, Petrarch resolved to seek relief from the agitations of love in travel; and, after some resistance from his patrons, obtained leave of absence to visit Germany, and thence to proceed to Rome. Only two of the letters which he wrote to the Cardinal during his journey are in existence, but they sufficiently attest the activity of his mind, and with how much acuteness and care he made his observations. "Eager," says he, in a letter dated Aix-la-Chapelle, "to see and know every thing, I have passed some time in endeavouring to separate the true from the false, struck, as I often am, with astonishment and admiration. When the day has not been sufficient for my researches, I have employed a part of the night: by doing thus, by seeing and reflecting, I flatter myself I have learned to distinguish truth from fable in the history of this great city." Again: "In the course of my journey, I have seen, it must be confessed, many excellent things. I have examined with care the manners and customs of the

countries through which I have passed. I have compared them with our own, and have seen nothing which leads me to regret that I was born in Italy. On the contrary, the farther I travel, the more I love, the more I admire my country. If Plato thanked the gods for having been born in Greece, how much gratitude do we not owe to Heaven for having given us Italy for our country? There is not a Greek who would have the assurance to say, that it is better to be born in Greece than in Italy: it would be the same as to say, that it is better to be born in chains than on a throne. Before Rome existed, the fourth part of Italy, waste and desert, was peopled by Greeks, who gave it the appellation of *Magna Græcia*. What name would they not have given it, after the Romans had destroyed Corinth, ravaged Ætolia, taken Argos, Mycænæ, and the other cities of Greece; vanquished Pyrrhus, triumphed over the kings of Macedonia, &c.? In truth, it must be better to be an Italian than a Greek. I do not think any of them would dispute the point with me."

On setting out from Avignon, Petrarch had agreed to return to that city before proceeding to Italy, as the Bishop of Lombes awaited him in order that they might visit Rome in company.

After, therefore, passing through part of Germany, and traversing the forest of Ardennes, considered in that age an enterprize of no ordinary danger, he arrived at Lyons on the fourth of August. He was there met by a servant of the Cardinal's, from whom he learnt with surprise and regret that the bishop had already set out from Avignon for Rome. The letter which he immediately dispatched to his friend expressed how much he was affected at this circumstance. "I know not," says he, "what name to give either you or your unkind treatment of me. Shall I say you have forgotten your promise? I know you never forget any thing. That you have no regard for those who are attached to you? Nothing is so contrary to your character. Shall I say that you have broken your faith? Your veracity is too well known. What then? I must leave it to you—you must be both the accused, the witness, and the judge. Answer me this then, afflicted as I am. Why are you at Rome while I am in France? What have I done that I should deserve to be thus separated from you? Have you rejected me as a useless burthen? Does my company displease you? You must decide these questions: but since sorrow and adversity compel me to boast, I will tell you, even with the permission of Lælius and

your other friends, that there is no one whose society is more agreeable to you than mine, or which is fitter for your station. Perhaps you fear that I should betray your secrets? But have you found me betraying any of those you have entrusted to me? Can you reproach me with any indiscretion? Even with the slightest imprudence? No person, I venture to say, can keep a secret better than I: in ancient times they would have given me a place in the senate, or among the priests of Ceres. We read that among the ancient Persians nothing was more sacred than fidelity—nothing fairer than silence—nothing more disgraceful than loquacity: the first they kept with death; the second they punished by death. But perhaps you are unwilling to interrupt me in my pursuits? Of what use is it that I have lived with you, if you do not know that I am not like the people of whom Horace speaks, who, extending their views to the future, embrace a thousand projects at one time; or of courtiers, who, meting out their souls, make court to every body, and love no one. We are often deceived in judging of ourselves, and I may perhaps estimate myself falsely: but of this I am sure, that I desire to be of the number of those philosophers who wish for nothing. I have never

desired to please a great many persons, knowing that he who seeks to be like the few, will be hated of the many. In you are centered all my hopes and expectations. You wish perhaps to let me see that they have been ill-placed! If so, I ought to thank you for having now informed me of it, but allowed me to depart without saying any thing, instead of letting me learn it from either looks or words which might have too much mortified me; but if you only wished to try me, and to re-awaken my zeal, I confess I am not sufficiently strong to endure such a trial." * He then supposes that the cause of his friend's conduct may possibly have been a wish to save him from the fatigues or danger of the journey, and argues against this idea by citing all the instances of courage and patience he had given during his journey to Lombes, and in that which he had just completed, concluding his epistle with expressions of the strongest anxiety about the answer, which he should expect at Avignon. On reaching that city, he had the satisfaction to learn that his friend had been obliged by urgent necessity to set out for Rome before his return, the contest which the Colonni were at that time waging with their powerful rivals the

* Epist. Fam. lib. i. Ep. 5.

Ursini rendering his presence in the capital of the utmost importance.

Absence had neither diminished the fervour of Petrarch's love, nor the virtuous resolution of Laura. His melancholy, therefore, which he had hoped to cure by change of scene and occupation, remained the same, and his sole relief consisted in the expectations which the Pope allowed him to form that the Court would be shortly removed to Rome; but on the death of John, this hope, so dear to Petrarch, was destroyed. Benedict XII., shortly after ascending the pontifical throne, determined on erecting a palace at Avignon, and to make that city his permanent residence. If our poet, however, was disappointed by this circumstance, he subsequently gained through it a portrait of Laura from the hand of the celebrated painter Sanese Simone Memmi, employed by the Pope in the decorations of his new palace.*

It is to this period also we are to assign the commencement of his visits to Vaucluse, for which he had expressed so great an admiration in his earliest youth, and which the state of his feelings now rendered peculiarly attractive. In his travels he had wandered with delight over the most so-

* Baldelli.

litary tracts of country; the gloom of forests, the most deserted plains, the wildest and most rocky valleys, giving him more pleasure than gay and splendid cities; and though naturally timid and averse to enterprise, he passed through several dangerous provinces without company or protection. In the vale of Vaucluse he found a solitude as complete as that of more distant wilds, and that mixture of gloom and beauty which favours by turns the indulgence of passion and the visitations of fancy. This retreat, which was already famous for the singular attractions of its scenery, but has been rendered so much more so by Petrarch, is situated at the foot of Monte Ventoso, and is watered by the river Sorga, which here divides itself into several streams. Precipitous rocks rise around its fountain, which thus protected and being singularly pure and limpid, might well seem to a poetic eye to have something sacred in its waters. Soon after the stream overflows the chasm into which the spring empties itself, it is hurled down the rocky heights with a fearful noise, which strangely contrasts with the perfect silence and tranquillity of the basin in which the waters are collected. Above this bed of the fountain swells a cliff of prodigious height, the dark and sterile sides of

which throw a constant shade over the waters; at its base it opens into a double cavern, which, when the stream is low, can be entered, and to which few other spots in the world may be compared for gloom and desolateness. A degree of mystery also attends the fountain, which increases the solemnity of the scene. It has never, it is said, been fathomed, but rising without noise or bubble, seems to have its origin in the very foundations of the globe. The small patches of ground left open among the cliffs are luxuriously fertile, and are covered, or at least were so in the time of Petrarch, with olives, and the richest vegetation. In the distance, a wide and delicious prospect opposes itself to the rude rocks which occupy nearly the whole valley of Vaucluse, and the dews and frequent showers for which the neighbourhood is noted, temper the summer heats so as to render it constantly cool and fragrant.

His friend, the Bishop of Lombes, was in the mean time actively engaged at Rome in the struggles of his family. Petrarch continued to correspond with him, and express his earnest desire to join him in the capital. The complaints however, which he made respecting the sufferings of his heart, were answered by the good prelate

in a style which proved him, like a good churchman, to be sceptical on all such subjects. "Your Laura," says he, in a letter written to him in the year 1335, "is but a phantom which your imagination has created, that you may have a subject on which to exercise your muse, and make yourself a name. Your verses, your love, your sighs, all are but a fiction with you, and if there be any thing whatever real in the matter, it is not your passion for Laura, but your wish for the laurel, after which both your studies and your works prove you are striving. I have been your dupe too long. You have pretended that you wish to visit Rome. I have expected you there with great delight; but my eyes are at length opened; I understand your deceit, yet I cannot help loving you, and wishing you to love me in return." In reply to the part of the letter which we have quoted, Petrarch says, "Would to Heaven that Laura were only an imaginary person, and that my love were but a jest! Alas! it is a madness which it would be difficult long to feign. And what extravagance would it not be to play such a farce! It is possible, perhaps, to imitate the action, the voice, and gesture of a sick man, but can his look and appearance be copied? How many times have you not seen me

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pale and trembling with affliction? I know, however, that you are but employing against me your favourite instrument of irony; and it becomes you well; you yield not to any one—not even to Socrates himself; but I hope to cure this malady; time will do it, I trust; and that Saint Augustine whom I also only seem to love, will furnish me with weapons against a Laura who exists not." M. the Abbé de Sade observes in respect to the letter to which this is an answer, "that it is one of those on which some writers have attempted to found the absurd opinion that Laura was not a real person, a notion which the letter of the bishop is amply sufficient to confute." He at length set out on his proposed journey into Italy, and the first sight of its coast inspired one of the best and most elevated productions of his muse.* At Capranica he passed some time with Orso, Count of Anguillara, who had married a sister of the Cardinal, and treated our poet with the greatest hospitality, till the bishop and some other friends arrived to conduct him in safety to Rome. His residence there furnished him with continual occupation, and he traversed every scene of classic renown in company with the venerable Giovanni da S. Vito,

* Son. LI.

whose enthusiasm made him equal to support the fatigue of attending his youthful companion. He returned to Avignon in 1337, and formed, it appears, a connexion with some lady of that city, by whom he had a son, who lived to the age of twenty-four, and gave his father no little trouble by the occasional untowardness of his disposition. He had also another child, a daughter, whether by the same person is uncertain, but she proved his greatest consolation and support during his declining years.

Finding himself still tormented with ceaseless inquietude, which he in vain attempted to cure by plunging into pleasure, he retired to Vaucluse, and bade adieu to the world and all the objects which had once inspired his ambition, but were now rendered unfascinating by his engrossing passion for Laura. The life he had determined to lead in his retirement was that of a hermit, and he only made provision, therefore, for supplying the immediate necessities of nature. He was there, he says, to make war with his senses; and his eyes, which had been so long attracted with useless vanities, should behold only the firmament, the rocks, and the water, instead of glittering jewels, and purple and ivory. The cottage

he inhabited was adjoining that of an old fisherman, whose wife was his sole attendant, so swarthy and ill-favoured a being that she might have been taken for a native of the Libyan deserts. These were his neighbours, and his only companion was a dog. But he found ample employment for his thoughts as he wandered through the valley thinking of his Laúra; and when he returned to his little dwelling, he consoled himself with those mute but most faithful friends, his books. From them he derived light and comfort, some furnishing him with rules how to live well, others consoling him with the relation of noble actions and stirring events; and those of another class instructing him in the sciences.

Amid these occupations he passed day after day, and week after week, keeping silence from morning till night, and hearing no other sounds but the bleating of sheep, the singing of birds, or the murmurs of the fountain as it streamed among the rocks. Nor was his diet unfitting for this retired mode of living. The coarse bread of the fisherman was the staple of his meals, and his greatest luxury a few figs or almonds.

He was not, however, entirely forsaken by his friends. Among those who came most frequently

to visit him in his retreat was Guido Settimo, who had been educated with him, and had always cherished for him the most lively regard. Another of his acquaintances who manifested a similar affection for him was Philip Cabassole, Bishop of Cavaillon, in which diocese Vaucluse was situated, a man of great learning and ability, and deserving the respect which Petrarch had conceived for him; a rare praise when virtue had so little concern in the elevation of churchmen.*

While thus enjoying the solitude of Vaucluse, Petrarch continued to compose numerous sonnets, and not forgetting the grand literary projects with which he had sought retirement,† he began a history of Rome in Latin, which was to embrace the long period that intervened between the foundation of the city and the reign of the Emperor Titus. To this undertaking, and the ideas of Roman grandeur with which it filled his mind, was owing another, namely, a Latin epic, intended to celebrate the actions of Scipio Africanus, and of which he produced a considerable portion in a few months, to the delight of his admiring, but, in this instance, ill-judging friends. Vaucluse, indeed, was for many, and those the best years of his life, the

* Baldelli. † Ginguené.

grand scene of his literary labours; "the history would be a long one," says he, in one of his epistles, "should I attempt to relate all I did there; this, however, I may say, that whatever works I shall leave behind me were either done, commenced, or conceived there."*

But his solitary mode of life, though productive of occasional tranquillity, was not calculated to procure him any permanent relief, and he was sometimes so oppressed with melancholy that his health grew daily worse, and he was tempted to pray for death. While his mind was in this state of agitation he appealed from his books to religion, but his heated imagination not suffering him to contemplate truth in her own simple majesty, he was near falling a victim to the visionary dogmas which were then in vogue. Denis de Robertis was his principal guide in the study of theology, and if we are to believe the declarations of his contemporaries, there were few churchmen of either that or any previous age who excelled him in variety of learning and talent. Petrarch first became acquainted with him, it is supposed, at Paris, during his sojourn in which city he confessed to him the violent passion with which he

* Epist. ad post.

was enchained.* But whether the advice of this learned divine was unfitted to make an impression on the mind of a man like our poet, or that it was attended to for a brief period and then forgotten, certain it is that Petrarch profited less than might have been expected from his counsels. The gloom of his spirit refusing to yield to the suggestions of his faith, his love continued to glow with the same fervour as ever, and his meditations on subjects of religion became tinged with the impressions of his fancy.

It appears that though Petrarch confined himself almost constantly to the neighbourhood of his cottage or the environs of the valley, he was sometimes tempted to visit Avignon, not more than fifteen miles distant, during which visits he often met Laura; but thinking to avoid th temptation to which he had exposed himself, he would either turn round or pass her quickly on the other side of the street. However pure and honourable Laura was in her heart, she is said to have considered this conduct as neither necessary nor becoming; and one day when they accidentally met she regarded him with a look more tender and compassionate than customary. The same mark

* Abbe de Sade.

of kindness was again and again repeated, and he forgot every resolution he had formed to obliterate her image from his heart. His sonnets breathed more of hope than they had hitherto done, and he even felt sufficiently encouraged to determine that he would no longer shun so timidly the presence of one from whose looks he derived such happiness. An opportunity occurred for his putting this resolution into practice. Meeting the object of his passion he approached her respectfully, and with an air which was intended to express the most profound regard, but the first word of his salutation had hardly escaped his lips when Laura hastened abruptly away, prohibiting him from ever again addressing her. Deeply affected by this rebuke, he fell dangerously ill, and it was not till he once more saw a smile on the face of Laura that he was restored to health.

The evidence, however, on which this relation of Laura's conduct depends, is too slight to guide us to a right estimate of her character. 'She desired,' says the Abbé de Sade, 'to be loved by Petrarch, but never to hear him speak of his love. She treated him with the greatest rigour when he attempted to tell his passion, but when she saw him despairing and ready to abandon all hope,

she reanimated him by some slight favour, a look or a single word. This alternative, of great punishments and little favours, so distinctly indicated in Petrarch's poems, is the key to Laura's whole conduct.' It was by this artifice, called by our author an innocent one, but not altogether, perhaps, deserving such an epithet, that she contrived, he says, to hold in captivity for more than twenty years a man of the most ardent and impetuous disposition, and without making even the smallest sacrifice of her honour. Those, concludes he, who would understand Petrarch aright ought never to lose sight of this circumstance.

Supposing, indeed, that Petrarch wrote a sonnet for each variation which he thought he could discover in Laura's countenance, the theory of this excellent biographer may be correct; but with great respect for the ingenuity with which he has thus formed a perfect chronicle of his hero's love, it may be reasonably doubted whether the sonnets admit of so absolute and close an application. That the lover might in his visits to Avignon, and his meetings with Laura in public places, watch her very earnestly, is not unlikely; that she did not always appear with the same frown or the same smile on her countenance is still more

probable. It is also equally possible that Petrarch might be affected according to the chance expression which her features wore; but it is almost more than theorizing to assert that each sonnet may be taken out of its place and so arranged as to form, with its companions, a sort of chronological table from which, having put them into prose, we may write a veritable history of the loves of Laura and Petrarch.

There is something, however, so pleasing in every discovery which tends to prove that the inspiration of poetry, and true, fervent feeling are the same, that we might fairly be tempted to leave the Abbé's theory untouched; but it involves a more serious question than that respecting the truth of the poet's sentiments at the moment he was writing. Supposing de Sade to be correct in his explication of the sonnets, Laura is proved beyond question to have been one of the greatest and most perfect coquettes that ever existed. Her ingenuity in so duly apportioning her smiles and frowns,—the keenness of her penetration in discovering the true state of the poet's feelings, and the selfish indifference with which she seems to have sacrificed his peace to her pride, would bespeak a sterner appellation than coquetry; but the exquisite delicacy in which

Petrarch himself placed the chief beauty of Laura, renders us unwilling to suppose that she was so hackneyed in the vulgarest arts of her townswomen. Avignon was remarkable for the almost rude licentiousness of its inhabitants; but it was for the most angelic purity both of manners and sentiments, and for a modesty which gave her whole figure the air of a Madonna, that she was beloved so passionately by our poet. It is difficult to believe that this attractive sweetness of demeanour, which preserved her image fresh and unsullied in her lover's mind to his latest day, could have been kept unmarred had she exercised so much art. Nor is it likely, we may add, if her purpose had been so decidedly to hold Petrarch in her trammels for the gratification of her pride, that he could have failed to discover some sign of her intentions, which, it is not improbable, would have broken the spell with which admiration of her modest beauty had at first possessed his soul. He was neither unacquainted with the world, nor unskilled in the knowledge of the female heart; he had suffered too much, if his love was real, not to seize on the discovery of Laura's coquetry as an argument to forget her; and if he only wanted an object on which to bestow immor-

tality by his verses, or by a pretended passion for whom he might acquire the name of a devoted lover, Laura would have had no occasion to practise any art against him, and if she had, a reputed coquette would have been the least suited of all women for the etherial portraitures of Francesco.

The year 1339 was diversified by several circumstances which tended, in some measure, to abstract his thoughts from Laura. It was about this period that the learned Monk Bernardo Barlaam arrived at Avignon as the Ambassador of the Greek Emperor Andronicus. The immediate object of his mission was to treat with the Pope respecting a settlement of the much agitated dispute respecting the keeping of Easter, to which was mainly owing the schism between the Eastern and Western branches of the Christian Church. The efforts of the Ambassador were fruitless; but his visit to the place of Petrarch's residence was of great use to the latter, as it afforded him an opportunity of gaining instruction in the Greek language, which had, for many years, been an object of his earnest desire. Barlaam, though not a native of Greece, was highly accomplished in all the learning of that country.* The veneration which Petrarch evinced for the poets and philosophers, whose glory he seemed to feel as

* Tiraboschi.

in part belonging to himself, won his favour, and the talents he discovered in his new acquaintance secured his lasting friendship. During his stay at Avignon, Petrarch spent a great portion of his time in his company, seizing with avidity the precious opportunity for initiating himself in the knowledge of Homer and Plato. In return for the instructions of Barlaam, he gave him lessons in Latin, of which language the Ambassador had only an imperfect knowledge. But the ill success which attended the discussions at the Pontifical court, separated these erudite men before they had either of them derived the profit they would otherwise have received from their intercourse. They however parted delighted with the learning and good qualities of each other, and Petrarch is supposed to have derived from his short study with Barlaam, that tincture of Platonism, with which he was so fond of imbuing both his prose and verse, and, as it seems, both his heart and imagination.

About this period, also, his old friend and spiritual adviser, Denis de Robertis, arrived at Avignon, and renewed his exhortations, though with as little effect as before. But, though he made less impression by his excellent counsel than he desired, he was regarded by his pupil with the

greatest veneration, and returned his attachment by several instances of parental kindness. On leaving Avignon for Naples, he promised to recommend him to King Robert, whose learning and virtues made him respected by all the learned men of Europe. Denis fulfilled his promise, and the King, already acquainted with the genius of Petrarch, wrote to him shortly after, and requested his advice respecting an epitaph he had composed for the tomb of a favourite niece, who died when young. The following passage from Petrarch's answer to this letter is too remarkable to be passed over.

"I envy the fate of this niece, whose epitaph you have deigned to send me. Taken away in the flower of her age and of her beauty; universally regretted in the kingdom where she was born, and which had the glory of possessing her, she appears to me happy, not only because she enjoys the happiness of eternal life, but because you have rendered her immortal by your eulogium. How would any one dare to say she is dead, whom God has rendered immortal in Heaven, and King Robert on earth! Can any thing be more glorious than this twofold life? What happiness to owe both the one and the other to those who are the greatest in

Heaven and on earth? Your epitaph will make the memory of your niece to pass to posterity with your own: she will always live with you and the greatest men of all ages. People will say of her as Alexander did of Achilles, How happy is she to have had her praises sung by so great a poet? But I fear to weary you with too long a letter. The elegant brevity of yours warns me to conclude. I pray that Heaven may preserve a head so precious as yours, and crowned as it is with the laurels of both Mars and Apollo."

It is not easy to determine whether this language resulted from the ready adulation of an experienced courtier, or from the genuine feeling of admiration with which the character of Robert had inspired the writer. To whichever cause we ascribe the gross and disgusting flattery of such a letter, it is equally repulsive to a modern English ear, whether we place ourselves in the situation of the giver or the receiver. There appears, however, some reason to believe that Petrarch was not guilty of more than a seeming offence against the manliness and truth of a scholar and moralist. The King of Naples deserved that respect should be paid him; and the best argument that can be advanced as a proof that Petrarch only meant to

evince his honour for him as a patron of letters, is the indifference with which he treated the splendours and temptations of courts, even in his earlier years—it being only the learned and philosophical friends of the Colonni, and the members of that noble family, for whom he ever evinced the smallest regard. The sole temptation which could have made him the flatterer of King Robert, was his strong desire to obtain a wide literary reputation. Naples was, at that time, the resort of the most illustrious scholars. The Sovereign himself was not only their patron, but aimed at the highest celebrity as a poet and philosopher. Whoever had the good fortune to acquire his esteem, and receive his praise, possessed a passport to the world at large; and it was, therefore, with emulous anxiety that all men of promising talents sought introductions to his court. It is, consequently, doubtful whether Petrarch did not allow himself to pen the flaring compliments he paid the King with the hope of ensuring his attention—a weakness from which an eulogist would gladly prove him to have been free, but of which the biographer can scarcely with honesty acquit him.

The letter, however, which he wrote about the same time, in answer to one from Denis de Robertis,

may contribute to throw farther light on the subject, as it contains the very highest praises of the King, given, it is possible, without any idea of their meeting the eye of the Monarch. "When I think of him," says he, "I am accustomed to admire, not so much his diadem as his manners; not so much his sovereignty as his mind. They only are kings who can rule themselves as well as their subjects. Kings are, therefore, much rarer than the multitude supposes. We should see very few sceptres and crowns, if it were only true kings that bore them. It is a folly to give the name to men who are the slaves of their passions, who have no power over themselves, and who more resemble brutes than human creatures. It is a great thing to be a king—a very little one to be only called so. The mere honour of the station makes others only dreaded; but Robert is truly glorious, for he governs himself, and affords an example of unequalled patience and moderation!" In the same letter he informed his friend that he had fully resolved to follow him to Naples without delay, and that he hoped to find there that reward of his labours, in the kindness of the King, which he had so long been desirous of obtaining.

The introduction he had thus secured to the

most powerful member of the literary republic—the fame which his poems and learning had acquired him, both in Italy and France, and his ambition,—equal in strength to his passion for Laura—all tended to make this year a memorable epoch in his life, while the customs of the age contributed to spur his ambition forward to attempts which the retiring character of his disposition would otherwise have prevented him from making.

Learning at its revival, like all other novelties, was an object of wonder and admiration. It was a new sun in the moral hemisphere, and even those who could not understand either whence it derived its brightness, or in what its precise glory consisted, were led to regard the elect few who understood its mysteries with veneration, and even awe. The ability to trace back the course of things to ages the most remote—to describe the manners of generations that had, till now, been swept away from men's memories—to bring back even the mighty spirits of the olden time, and reveal what they thought and saw in the days of inspiration—this was, indeed, a wonderful power to people who had not been made familiar with such things by the universal diffusion of books and knowledge—and those who exercised it were not un-

worthy of the high honour which they received. They were, many of them, believed to have the faculty of changing the course of nature—of foretelling events, and making the powers of other worlds obedient to their will. But the admiration which this belief acquired for them with the vulgar, was not so high as that which they deserved for what they did in reality. They exercised a magic, but it was that which the Providence of Heaven had taught them; and, instead of merely commanding the spirits of the deep to do their temporary bidding, they bound them in the everlasting bonds of truth and science.

But the vague, though vivid admiration of learned men, and especially of poets, which prevailed among the populace, led to the institution of customs which might be suited to their comprehension, and figure by the splendour of shows and ceremonies, the intellectual excellence which in itself they were unable to apprehend. To this, probably, was owing the public crowning of poets, which was supposed to invest him who obtained that honour with a superiority to all his less favoured contemporaries. The usage, however, had for a considerable time been neglected, and Petrarch could find, perhaps, only classical examples for the

custom he wished to see re-established in his favour. But it may not be an improbable supposition, that the gay festivals of the Provençals first inspired him with the idea of attempting to revive the coronation of poets. In his journey to Lombes with the Bishop, he is said to have been present at one of the contests for the golden violet, and to have been greatly delighted with the display. At any rate, there was something so similar in the two institutions, that he might, without any extravagant vanity, desire to see his own Italy renew a custom which might make her poets equally honourable in the eyes of men as those of Provence. There is no doubt that this was one of his strongest motives for his using so many exertions on the subject, and that the supposition of his wishing to be crowned with laurel, because he loved Laura, is wholly puerile and unfounded.

But whatever were the motives by which he was instigated, Petrarch left no means unemployed to obtain the honour of being publicly crowned. To this end, as we have seen, he carefully cultivated the acquaintances of the great and the influential; and impelled by the same motive pursued his studies with the ardour of a young man labouring for academical conquests. So closely

indeed did he apply himself that his friends trembled for his health, and the Bishop of Cavaillon, obtaining the key of his study, locked up his books, prohibiting his reading or writing for ten days. Petrarch was obliged to yield an unwilling obedience to the prelate; but the first day of his literary lent seemed longer to him than a year, the second he suffered a violent headache from morning to night, and the third he was attacked with symptoms of a fever, which the bishop seeing, desisted from attempting to cure him by depriving him of his books. In a letter written about this time, in which he describes his manner of living, he says that he devoted six hours to sleep, and two to supplying the necessary wants of nature; but that even during his meals he either read or dictated. While walking or travelling he had his mind occupied in designing or making additions to some poem or other work: he never went into the country without taking a pen and paper with him, and he would often rise in the middle of the night, and write down without a light the thoughts which came into his mind.

At length the day arrived for reaping the reward of all these toils and exertions. While walking

* Abbé de Sade.

in his orchard at Vaucluse on the morning of the twenty-third of August 1340, a letter was brought him from the Senate of Rome, announcing its determination to confer upon him the laurel crown. His delight was extreme on receiving this long-desired intelligence, which was the more grateful to him as he had almost despaired of ever carrying his point with the Romans, now chiefly occupied with their civil discords. To increase the glory of his triumph, the day had not passed before another messenger arrived from Robert Bardi, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, inviting him to proceed without delay to that city, where the honours of a public coronation were also awaiting him.

It was not easy for Petrarch to decide at once to which of the capitals he should give the preference. Novelty inclined him in favour of Paris, ancient custom made him prefer Rome—in the one he would find a friend, but in the other a country;* and from the latter he accordingly determined to receive the crown.

But ambitious as he had been to acquire the distinction which awaited him, he was not without apprehensions as to his qualification for so

* Baldelli.

high an honour. This at least he himself asserted, and to secure his mind from any uneasiness on the subject, he resolved to undergo a public examination by the King of Naples, before proceeding to Rome. Shortly after forming this resolution, he set out on his journey, and was received by Robert, to whose influence his success with the senate was mainly owing, with the most marked attention. In the long conversations which they held together, their mutual esteem was greatly increased, and the King was not less gratified than Petrarch at the acquaintance which Denis de Robertis had procured him.

On the day appointed, the monarch assembled his whole court to be present at the examination. Every species of science and literature furnished the erudite sovereign with questions, his ready answers to which made Petrarch an object of admiration to all present. For three days the examination was thus carried on to the credit of both the king and the poet, and on the third, the former pronounced the candidate to be in every way worthy of the honours with which he was about to be invested. Robert would have been happy could he have persuaded Petrarch to be crowned at Naples, but not pressing this

wish against the prejudice of the latter in favour of the Roman Capitol, he bade him an affectionate farewell, telling him that it was his infirmities alone which prevented his accompanying him, and sending his friend Giovanni Barrili to attend him as his representative. At the same time he took off his royal robe, with which he presented him, in order that he might wear it on the day of his coronation.

On the eighth of April 1341, it being Easter-day, Petrarch obtained the distinction he had so eagerly sought. Early in the morning the streets of Rome resounded with trumpets, and the shouts of multitudes thronging to witness the august ceremony. The poet, as he proceeded to the Capitol, was preceded by eighteen young and noble Romans, twelve of whom were habited in scarlet robes, the rest in green. The Senator and chief officers of State came next, and thus escorted, he passed through the principal public avenues to the scene of his triumph. The streets had been thickly strewn with flowers, and the windows of every house were filled with ladies, who, while the songs and music of those who accompanied the procession, made the whole seem like a magic show, flung the richest perfumes from the balconies, and so freely, it is said, that the scents

thus expended would have served the whole of Spain for a year. When the assembly arrived at the Capitol, Petrarch made a short speech, and saluted the people, after which he kneeled down, and the Senator taking the crown of laurel placed it on his head, saying, that it was the reward of rare merit and virtue. Then rising, amid the applauses of the spectators, Petrarch recited a sonnet on the heroes of the Tiber, and was conveyed to the church of Saint Peter with the same solemnity as he had been conducted to the Capitol. Taking off his crown at the altar, he hung it up as an offering of gratitude to God, and then proceeded to the palace of Stephen Colonna, where a sumptuous banquet and the chief personages of Rome awaited him. After spending a few days among his friends, and receiving a diploma from the senate, which designated him a poet, an historian, and a citizen of Rome, he set out on his return to Avignon. In the course of his journey, he visited Parma, where he was warmly received by Azzo da Corregio, the cause of whose family he had pleaded most successfully and eloquently before the Pope, when the right to the principality was contested. Azzo had since seized the government, but Petrarch was sufficiently contented with

his conduct to purchase a cottage in the neighbourhood of the city, which he improved into so delightful a residence, that he was unwilling to leave it, though summoned away by the Cardinal Colonna. But it was while enjoying this retreat, and continuing his poem of Africa, that he had to sustain the affliction of losing two of his most affectionate and esteemed friends, Tommaso da Messina one of his fellow-students at Bologna, and the Bishop of Lombes. A curious circumstance occurred previous to his receiving the intelligence of the prelate's decease, which is worthy of being related, as it indicates the disposition of Petrarch's mind to superstition, especially in the latter years of his life, though he openly professed his disbelief in dreams and visions. While sound asleep one night, he thought he beheld his friend passing over the little stream which watered his garden. He ran to him, asked him whence he came so unexpectedly, whither he was going, and why he was alone? The bishop returned an answer signifying that, like him, he had grown weary of the continual storms and gloom which pervaded his mountainous retreat. Conversing in this manner, they seemed to approach the end of the garden, when Petrarch begged permission to accompany him, but his friend warned

him back with his hand, and with a changed countenance and voice, said solemnly, "Depart! I do not wish you now to be my companion." Twenty-five days after this dream, intelligence arrived at Parma that the bishop was dead, and that his decease had taken place on the very day on which Petrarch had been so singularly affected.

His grief at the loss of his friend was extreme. "We have lived too long," says he, in a letter to Lælius, who had witnessed the last hours of the prelate; "we have lost the best of masters, the tenderest of fathers. What course shall I pursue—what will become of me? I am a mere stranger at Parma, every instant on the move. Shall I go to Lombes where I am canon? It is a savage, inhospitable country, and I have now lost the only person who could have rendered it tolerable to me. How could I endure to look on the tomb where all my hopes lie buried? How could I bear to kiss the hands of a proud and barbarous pontiff instead of that master's who was so dear to me? Shall I return to Avignon, to place myself again in the court of the Cardinal? How dull, how melancholy must every thing appear there now it has lost its greatest ornament!"

The plans which Petrarch had formed seem

to have been entirely disarranged by the death of his patron, and having been presented with the archdeaconry of Parma, he is supposed to have formed the resolution of prolonging his stay in that city till he should recover his tranquillity. But not only was his distress farther increased by the death of Denis de Robertis, but he received orders from Avignon to repair thither without delay.

It is somewhat singular that his being obliged to return to that city, should have occasioned him so much uneasiness as he expresses on the occasion. The most probable explication, perhaps, that can be given of the mystery, is that he found himself unexpectedly enjoying a degree of repose which his passion had hitherto not allowed him to acquire. If this were indeed the case, he acted with more prudence than he had formerly evinced: but in Italy he enjoyed many pleasures which even his favourite Vaucluse could not afford him. He was an enthusiastic admirer of the country which he delighted to call his native land, and his mind was bent upon doing something which should render him still worthier of the honours he had received. Laura could there tempt him from the quiet of his study neither by smiles nor frowns, and, add to all, he was far removed from the power

of the Pope whom he most sincerely despised, both for his ignorance and his dislike to Italy. These were sufficient reasons to make him wish to remain in Parma, and had he been suffered to do so, he might, perhaps, have lost his love for Laura, in the simple memory of her virtues.

So much, however, was his society desired by the Cardinal, that his commands put him under the necessity of returning to Avignon. After having spent, therefore, nearly a year at Parma, which is stated to have been among the happiest and most serene he ever enjoyed, he set out for Avignon, which he reached in health and safety, and was received with open arms by his old friends Lælius and Socrates.

The pleasure he received in the society of these his earliest acquaintances, and the attentions his fame procured him from all quarters, rendered his situation at Avignon much more agreeable than he had reason to expect. Even Laura herself was moved by the intelligence of her admirer's glory, and when she met him, her countenance wore a more benign aspect than before his journey to Rome. This circumstance, though not tending to the cure of his love, made him sufficiently contented to remain at Avignon, and his visits to

Vaucluse were seldom, and only for short periods. The means of communicating his sentiments to Laura, were also augmented by the acquaintance he had formed with Sennucio, an intimate friend of her family, and whose opportunities of seeing and conversing with her, Petrarch has commemorated in several sonnets.

Little is known of the domestic history of the object of our poet's love. It is, however, generally agreed that her marriage was not a happy one; that her husband was jealous, and the cares of her large family too great for her delicate constitution. At the period of which we are now speaking, she was about thirty years of age, a time of life at which we hardly expect to see the roses of female beauty greatly faded; but the splendour of Laura's youthful loveliness no longer existed even in the eyes of her ardent admirer; she was pale and languid, and had altogether the air of a person suffering under the premature advances of age. Petrarch himself also had for some time exhibited symptoms of declining strength, and before he was thirty his hair was grey, and his features expressive of a gravity strikingly contrasted with the youthful appearance of his figure.

But this year, 1342, called for his attention in affairs which nearly interested his feelings as a patriot. Benedict XII., after an inglorious pontificate, died unlamented by any person who had the least pretension to learning or refinement. It is not requisite to draw his character in this place, but one anecdote related of him will be sufficient to show the cause of the particular dislike with which he was regarded by Petrarch and his patrons the Colonni. While sitting at dinner one day with his courtiers, he expressed his great admiration of some fish which had been brought from Italy, but sarcastically remarked, as he turned towards the Cardinal Colonna, that he was surprised any thing so good could be found in that country. The Cardinal repressed his indignation, and only replied that if his Holiness had known it better, he would not have found reason to express such astonishment. Neither this, however, nor any of the frequent insults which Benedict endeavoured to put upon the Italians, was forgotten, and his death, earnestly desired by that party, was hailed as the most joyful event that could have happened.

The new Pope, Clement the Sixth, was a man of totally different character to Benedict. Elegant in his manners, voluptuous in his disposition, fond

of literature and the arts, and a general admirer of women, his court shortly presented a scene of constant gaiety and dissipation. But the favours which he bestowed on men of learning and his general good taste, induced Petrarch and others of the Italian party to hope that he might be persuaded to remove the seat of his authority to Rome. Petrarch, with whom was associated the famous Nicholas Gabrini, better known by the name of Rienzi, used all his influence and eloquence as a Roman citizen to effect this favourite purpose, but in vain; Clement heard the appeal with politeness but refused to accord the desired grace. Some blame, it is said, was due to Petrarch for the bad success of the attempt. The principal arguments on which he rested his plea for removing the see to Rome, were drawn from recollections of the holiness which that city had acquired from the sojourn of saints and apostles there, and from the blood with which holy martyrs had consecrated its soil; whereas, if the portrait of Clement be correctly drawn by contemporary historians, the orator should have omitted these topics for others of a more agreeable character, and fascinated the Pope's imagination with a

view of the superior delights which sunny Italy could afford to those of any part of France.*

Towards the latter end of this year, Barlaam arrived again at Avignon, and the intercourse between him and Petrarch was renewed with pleasure on both sides, but the stay which the Greek made was of short duration, a bishopric having been obtained for him in Calabria his native province. About the same time intelligence arrived of the death of Robert, King of Naples, which deeply affected Petrarch, and, unable to endure society in his grief, he hastened to Vaucluse. His brother Gerard also having lost a lady whom he tenderly loved, retired about the same time to a Carthusian monastery, where he passed the remainder of his life in prayer and penitence.

While his mind was yet suffering under the impression of melancholy, Petrarch undertook and completed his "Dialogues with St. Augustin," a work somewhat imbued with mysticism, but devout, eloquent, and highly interesting as an exposition of the sentiments of his heart. The essays even of Montaigne are considered as not more attractive in this respect than the dialogues of Petrarch. So fully did he explain in them the motives

* Abbé de Sade.

of his actions and the feelings in which they originated, that he applied to the work the title of "My Secret," and seems to have intended that it should not be published till after his death.

These remarkable discourses consist of three dialogues; in the first the saint lays down certain general rules of reasoning, such as that our being miserable or happy depends on our own conduct; that to have the desire of escaping from our miseries we must be aware of their nature and extent; that this desire can only exist in its full force when all other desires are extinguished, and that this can only take place when the thought of death has detached the mind from worldly objects. On these different points Petrarch and his teacher make various observations, the one acknowledging his indetermination to pursue that which he knows to be good and desires to obtain; the other, placing before him, in the strongest language, his extreme vanity, his avarice, ambition, incontinence, and misanthropy. The discussion on these subjects occupies the first two dialogues; the third contains a more particular enumeration of the penitent's errors and infirmities. He was bound, says the saint, by two chains which he forgot to regard as chains, though truly so, because of their decep-

tious brightness,—they were love and glory; and Augustine teaches him, in the plainest language, that he had been playing the part of a madman to suffer himself for so many years to be the object of a vain and guilty passion; to yoke his immortal soul to a frail perishing form of earth, which death would deprive of all its loveliness. Petrarch would have defended himself by replying that it was not the earthly form of Laura which had enchained his heart, but the beauty and virtue of her soul. Augustine confesses that this is a strong point of defence, but observes that if Laura were Virtue herself, yet he was not the less guilty if his own passion partook of the slightest impurity. To this Petrarch replies, that there was nothing criminal in his love but its excess; that he could wish his love to be seen even as her countenance could be seen, for there was a close resemblance between them, both being pure and spotless; that to his love for her he owed his glory and reputation; and that his heart, purified by its passion for a woman so angelically virtuous, had by that means been preserved from the worst vices of its nature.

Augustine, however, is unmoved by these arguments, and insists that Laura only saved him from the hazard of a slight fall to plunge him in an

abyss—that he had no reason to thank her for making him ambitious of glory, and that she had, in fact, put his soul in peril of destruction. "Instead of loving the Creator, you have devoted yourself to the creature; and if you say that she has taught you to love God, then you are guilty of having inverted the right order of things, for the Creator must be loved for himself alone and the creature for Him. As it now is, you have only loved God as you would admire a good workman who has made something which delights you. With regard to the present nature of your love for Laura, it may be enfeebled by years, but it is neither extinguished nor in reality more pure."

The saint then presses several other considerations of a similar nature upon his disciple; and it is curious to find that the idea of seeking another object of love had passed through the mind of Petrarch. But it is on the increase of his years that Augustine is made to expatiate with the greatest earnestness; he bids him observe how his hair is growing grey, and asks him whether he is not ashamed of making love with white locks. "I blush for and repent my folly," replies Petrarch, "but I can do no more; Laura, too, is growing old with me—that consoles me and abridges my feeling

of shame." The speakers then pass to the consideration of the desire of glory, and Augustine assures his disciple that he is wasting his life in the pursuit of a shadow, that fame is uncertain and changeable, and that the only renown worth seeking for is that which virtue bestows. "Leave Africa and Scipio, then," concludes he, "examine yourself, think of death and the life which is to come."

Petrarch was called from these ascetic studies to take part in the political affairs which were now engaging the attention of the pontifical court. Robert, at his death, had directed that a council of Regency should be formed for the government of the kingdom till his grand-daughter, the successor to the throne, should have attained her majority. Clement considered this as an infringement on his rights; and in order, if possible, to re-establish them, he determined on sending an ambassador to Naples to support his pretensions. The acquaintance which Petrarch had formed with the court, and his high reputation there, pointed him out as the fittest person that could be found for the mission, and in September 1343, he set out on his way to Italy.

On arriving at Naples, he found that city even

worse sunk in depravity than Avignon. Under the young Queen, herself weak and profligate, vice of every description had been suffered to gain ground in society; and finding it impossible to effect the purposes for which he was sent, Petrarch left it in extreme disgust and proceeded to Parma. He remained but a short time there. The country was everywhere disturbed with civil war, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he escaped one night from the city. A fall from his horse served considerably to increase his danger, but he at last succeeded in making his way to Bologna, whence he proceeded to Verona, and thence to Avignon. Clement, in testimony of his esteem for the talents he had evinced in his service, offered him a bishopric, or the post of pontifical secretary; but so strong was his love of liberty that he rejected both proposals, preferring to pursue his studies in freedom to the wealth and influence which he might have derived from either of the above situations.*

The year 1347 saw Petrarch again engaged in the affairs of which the details occupy so great a part of European history, during the fourteenth century. Cola di Rienzi, who had nine years before

* Bandelli.

been associated with him in the Roman embassy, had, by his eloquence and versatile ability, found means to possess himself, under the title of tribune, of the unlimited command of Rome. To win the admirers of its ancient fame to aid him in his purpose, he pretended to re-establish the various orders which had formerly existed in the city, while the favour of the populace, and of several states in Italy, was secured by his assurances that this reform would be followed by a tranquillity and security to persons and property, which had now for ages been unknown at Rome.*

The intelligence received at Avignon respecting the success of Rienzi's enterprise, filled the court with dismay; but Petrarch was elevated beyond measure with the prospect which seemed opened to him of Rome free, and restored to her ancient magnificence and rank. Full of these sentiments, he wrote to Rienzi, congratulating him on his success, and exhorting him to pursue a line of conduct which would heap so much glory on himself, and raise the capital of the world to its former pre-eminence among nations. Not content with thus counselling him at a distance, he resolved to hasten to Rome, that he might share in his triumphs, and

* Gibbon, Decline and Fall.

aid him by the utmost exertion of his abilities. His friends heard of this determination with regret. Even Laura, it is said, when he obtained permission to bid her farewell, changed countenance, and expressed sorrow at his resolution. She was with some of her usual acquaintances when this parting took place: she wore no ornaments—was pale and melancholy, and her whole appearance more dejected than he had ever seen it. Petrarch was affected, even to weeping, at observing these expressions of Laura's feeling, and left her without the power of saying adieu. The impression which her parting look made on his mind was never effaced!

When he arrived at Genoa, the unwelcome news reached his ears that Rienzi was destroying his new edifice of liberty and glory as rapidly as he had constructed it. Instead, therefore, of pursuing the route he had intended, he proceeded to Parma, where he received the horrible intelligence that by the order of the Tribune, nearly all the Colonni had been put to a violent death. This flagitious act, and the subsequent conduct of Rienzi, at length convinced Petrarch that he had been miserably deceived in the estimate of his colleague's ability or virtue. He, therefore, continued his journey from Parma to Verona, where he was

residing when the earthquake happened, which almost shook to their foundations Pisa, Bologna, Padua, and Venice. On the night when it occurred, June 25, 1348, he was sitting in his study—his books were suddenly flung from the shelves—the walls of the room seemed closing on him, while the loud noise and the violent shaking of the ground beneath his feet, almost deprived him of his senses. But the recollection of this event was shortly effaced by the miseries produced by the plague, which broke out soon after, and which spread, not only throughout Italy, but over the best part of Europe.

For some time this terrible pestilence made but slow progress, and Petrarch continued to recreate his mind by sometimes visiting Parma, at others Padua, where he was hospitably received, and found his company courted by all whose name and talents rendered them worthy of his attachment. But rumours of the progress of the plague became every day more alarming. First one and then another city was subjected to its scourge, and Petrarch had the affliction to hear of the death of Sennucio, and others of his acquaintance, by the malady. It was with great alarm he at length heard that the pestilence had reached the neighbourhood of Avignon. His mind, long oppressed

with anxiety for the health of Laura, had indulged the most melancholy reflections, which the recollection of her sorrow at parting served to render doubly distressing. So long, however, as he continued to receive intelligence respecting the real progress of the pestilence at Avignon, his anxiety was supportable: and every messenger that brought intelligence of Laura's being yet safe, encouraged him to hope that she might escape altogether.

But this relief was shortly after denied him. The plague gathered fresh strength day after day, and now raged with such violence, that all intercourse was prevented between the neighbouring cities. Frightful dreams were the only messengers Petrarch received respecting the fate of his mistress: in his sleep he fancied he saw her fall a victim to the disease, and heard her bid him farewell in the sweetest but most melancholy tones of her voice. These visions gained complete possession of his mind, and he ceased to cherish the smallest hope of ever again seeing her. His apprehensions proved true—Laura died of the plague on the very day in the month of April in which they had first met, and on the night of which he imagined she appeared to bid him farewell!

The grief, it is observed, which possessed him on receiving intelligence of her actual decease, has been left undescribed by any of his biographers;* but we require nothing more to aid the imagination on this subject than the sonnets which Petrarch wrote shortly after the event, and in which the genuine feelings of his mind are perhaps more clearly and vividly reflected than in any other of his works whatever.

The accounts which have been drawn from the scanty memorials that exist of Laura's last moments, strongly contribute to confirm the belief that her character had a large share of that purity and beauty which her lover has described it as possessing. It was on the third of April that she felt the first symptoms of illness; and, though it was doubtful whether they were indications of fatal malady, she immediately prepared herself for the worst, by receiving the sacraments, and composing her mind to religious meditation. The disorder left little time for doubt as to its real nature; and, by the sixth of the month, it had made such progress, that not the slightest hope remained of her recovery. But terrible as was the disease with which she was attacked, and, while other sufferers

* Ginguené.

were left to die unattended from the dread which the contagion inspired, her couch was surrounded by all her friends and relations, anxious to catch her last words and minister to her comfort. Death stole upon her rapidly, but without its usual fearfulness. It pervaded her veins, says the poet, without disturbing the sweet serenity of her countenance; and, after addressing those around her with calm and happy assurances of her faith, and of trust in the eternal life prepared for the virtuous, she expired amid the lamentations of all who had known her, and were best able to judge of her actions and disposition. She had borne eleven children, nine of whom survived her; but, as has been intimated, she enjoyed less domestic happiness than her virtue and prudence entitled her to expect. Of her person Petrarch has left numberless descriptions, but all too bright and sparkling to give a distinct idea of its actual features. According to these, however, her hair was of a golden brightness—her complexion purer than the virgin snow—her eyes so vividly sparkling, that they resembled the stars; but withal so soft and tender in their expression, that they inspired only feelings of love and reverence. In stature she was tall, and exquisitely graceful in her carriage; her voice was

clear and musical, and her manner of conversing always indicative of the dignity and sweetness which had an equal share in her character. The splendour of her dress corresponded to her beauty. Belonging to the noblest class of society, she was accustomed to appear in public apparelled in the costliest robes and jewels. Sometimes her vest was of purple, embroidered with flowers of gold, and bordered with azure; at others, her delicate form seemed enshrined amid roses, and richly adorned with precious pearls and diamonds. Her hair was generally left to flow loose over her neck and shoulders, but it was sometimes fastened up in a knot, and parted plainly on her forehead. Of her mind, it is said, that she possessed a natural flow of wit and intelligence, but had received little advantage from study or education. Such is the character of this celebrated woman's person and manners: but, after all that has been said respecting her, the question is still undecided, and must for ever remain so, whether she did not give more encouragement to Petrarch's attachment than was consistent with that perfect virtue of mind and heart, which it was her great glory to be renowned for, even in the licentious city of Avignon.

The manner, however, in which Petrarch speaks

of her, both in his Sonnets, his "Dialogues with St. Augustine," and other works, affords so strong an argument in proof of her perfect innocence of character, that it seems to me sufficient to outweigh all the surmises which have been advanced to the contrary. Had their fates allowed them to be united, or had she fallen beneath the united charms of poetry and a splendid fame, Petrarch, by his own confession, might have ceased to love her. And is it to be doubted that, if even by a word or gesture she had destroyed the spiritual charm with which he had invested her image, his love would not have lost those qualities by which it was distinguished from all ordinary passions? The style of his Sonnets can hardly be likened to that of any other amatory poetry; and it is because his love was fed with other nourishment than the common food of languishing hearts—such, indeed, as it little relished in its youthful days, but which preserved it fresh and green, when life itself was in the sere and yellow leaf. Had Laura not been somewhat different to the rest of her sex, Petrarch's poetry would not have been different to other love effusions: it might have been superior to them in harmony of versification and elegance of language, but it would not

have been remarkable for that lucid flow of clear, religious thought, which makes it like a stream of the brightest water rolling over a bed of pure crystal. This argument is also rendered doubly strong by our knowledge that when death had removed her from him, and when his mind was occupied with preparations for his own departure from the world, he continued to think of her with the same delight, and to record her virtues with equal warmth and enthusiasm.

Nor was it only in compositions formally devoted to her praise, that he thus expressed himself. In a manuscript Virgil, preserved in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, is a memorandum written in his hand, in which he thus simply and affectionately records the date of Laura's death, and of their first meeting.*

"Laura, illustrious by her own virtues, and widely celebrated in my verses, first met my eyes while I was yet a youth, on the morning of the 6th of April, in the year 1327, and in the church of St. Claire, at Avignon. And in the same city, in the same month, on the same day of the month, and at the same hour, but in the year 1348, she was taken from this world, while I, alas! was at Ve-

* Tiraboschi.

rona, ignorant of her fate! But intelligence of the fatal event was sent me by my friend Louis to Parma, where it reached me on the morning of the 19th of May. Her most chaste and beauteous body was deposited the same evening in the church of the Minor Friars, but her soul, I am persuaded, returned, as Cicero says of Africanus, to heaven, whence it came. It seemed good to me to record, as I do, with melancholy pleasure this sad event; and in a place which most frequently meets my eye, that I may be admonished by it to value nothing more in this world, but that, being free from bondage, I may escape altogether from Babylon, and be taught by contemplation and a right view of the uncertainty of life, boldly and decidedly to employ the grace of God in properly considering the vanity of my past pursuits!"

The sentiments expressed in this memorandum are sufficient to show the state of Petrarch's mind at the time it was written; and from this period we seem to behold him under the influence of feelings which had been long struggling for mastery, but had never, till now, found him sufficiently tranquil for their permanence. Hitherto many of his thoughts on religion appear to have been inspired by imagination, and only indulged in to feed the tender me-

lancholy to which he freely resigned himself. To analyze his emotions, to lament the swiftness with which time stole away his youthful vigour, and to dilate upon the vanity of the splendid reputation he was daily augmenting, afforded him an opportunity of employing the best powers of his eloquence —of pouring forth those majestic torrents of invective against the vices of his age, in which he delighted to employ his pen—and of proving the strength of his genius to some of the celebrated men whose friendship he had cultivated, and who were far better judges of lofty sounding treatises on theology, written in Latin, than of love-sonnets, composed in the vulgar dialect. While still yielding himself, therefore, to the fascinations of Laura, and even to temptations of a grosser kind—to the dictates of his ambition and vanity, he could find amusement and consolation in the composition of those works which remain as a proof of his learning and eloquence, and as indications of the tone of thought which was natural to his mind, but are, notwithstanding, the evident productions of a man aiming at sentimentalism, and employing the topics of religion for the subjects of his pen, because they admitted of a deeper colouring—a richer strain of declamation than any other.

But Petrarch, after the death of Laura, appears to have sought in religion the substantial food of his mind, and to have pursued the path she had marked out for his future life. His manner of speaking is that of a man truly weary of chasing shadows, and bowing under the conviction of truths which had hitherto only sparkled and glittered before his eyes, as fairly, but as ineffectually as the creations of his fancy. He reviews his past life, not with the complacency of a man who, though complaining of its vanity, is evidently satisfied with its glory; but with the doubtfulness of one who, while justly estimating the worth of an honourable reputation, is dissatisfied with having pursued it with too entire a sacrifice of time to its acquisition: and in many of the reflections he makes on futurity, and on the fate which should attend him in another world, there may be discovered an anxiety which was only giving way to a faith that hourly acquired additional strength and confidence. This, it is true, may be mere theory; but there is nothing in it which the subsequent events of Petrarch's life, so far as they are known, tends to contradict, or rather which they do not in a great measure confirm. Nor is it a supposition improbable in

itself. Petrarch had laboured for fame, and had won it—he had placed his affections on an object who was removed from the earth, and he was now of an age when the affections, resting on beings to whom they have long been devoted, may even grow stronger, and more fervent every day, but at which they have neither that versatility nor vividness which they have in youth, when they may be transferred from one object to another, and lose little, perhaps, of their warmth or earnestness. Add to all this: Petrarch, though he had at first probably been taught to seek solitude by ambition, had learned to find the highest degree of pleasure in retirement. The study and composition of religious works had prepared him for pursuing the consolations of devotion, when he found them actually necessary to his support; and his mind was of that character — mild, though enthusiastic — strongly susceptible of, and ready to confess, its weaknesses, though highly elevated—which offers the best soil for religious culture, producing at the same time the brighest flowers and the healthiest fruits of belief.

The death of Laura was shortly followed by that of the Cardinal Colonna, who, it is probable, died of the plague, as five other Cardinals did

during the time it prevailed; but it has been thought that his death might be owing to the awful afflictions he had lately suffered from the entire desolation of his noble house. In the course of five years he had lost his mother and six of his brothers, and found himself and the aged Stephen Colonna, the sole survivors of a family which had so short a time before been the most powerful in Italy. A circumstance of a similar nature to one or two already related, is said to have occurred previous to the calamities which wasted his house. When Petrarch was conversing at Rome with old Stephen Colonna, the latter observed, with tears in his eyes, and a look that seemed prophetical of coming ills, "I should have wished, and by the natural course of things I ought, to leave my children successors to my estates, but fate has willed it otherwise—the order of nature is reversed, and I, a feeble, decrepit old man, shall be left as the heir of my children." Some time after this, and just before the eldest brother of the Cardinal was assassinated, Petrarch was talking with the latter on the subject of the misfortunes with which his family seemed threatened. In the course of the conversation, he observed, "Your father foresaw these calamities; I now remember what he once said to me at Rome."

The Cardinal, seizing upon the remark, requested that it might be explained, which Petrarch unwillingly did, and having heard the prediction, he said, with a sigh, "May my father not be a true prophet!" His death, which happened at the period of which we are now speaking, fulfilled the prophecy, and Stephen Colonna, having survived for a few months the last of his family, followed him to the tomb.

Avignon had now no claim to Petrarch's regard; he had always abhorred its dissipation, and the Court of the Pope was, on this account, as hateful to him as the city. Laura and the Cardinal, with the friends who were collected round him, could alone have induced him to spend any part of his life in a place so foreign to his tastes. Of his acquaintances, the almost sole surviving ones were Socrates, Luke Christian, and Mainard Accorso. The first was still at Avignon, and used all his powers of persuasion to induce Petrarch to return thither. The two latter arrived at Parma the very day that Petrarch had set out for Padua, and had come with the intention of considering with him in what manner they might best spend the remainder of their days: but they not only missed meeting their friend, but shortly after leaving Parma were

attacked and taken prisoners by banditti in the employ of the Ubaldini, nor was it till Petrarch had used the greatest exertions, that they regained their liberty.

Our poet now employed his leisure in visiting various parts of Italy, and stayed some time at Mantua. In 1350 he wrote an epistle to Charles of Luxembourg, through whose influence he had conceived the hope that peace might be restored to his country, so long torn by the ruinous quarrels between the Popes and the Emperors. In the same year also he proceeded to Rome, in order to be present at the great Jubilee. In his journey he passed through Florence, which he had been long anxious to visit, and found there several friends with whom he was to pass a large portion of his future life. Among these was Boccaccio, who was at Naples when Petrarch visited King Robert. He was nine years younger than our poet, but was already celebrated for his wit and eloquence, and was received by Petrarch as an acquaintance well worthy of his attention and respect.

A short time after leaving Florence, Petrarch was seriously injured by a kick from the horse of his travelling companion, and was obliged to remain

some days in bed after he arrived at Rome, which circumstance he thus laments in a letter to Boccaccio. "Repose is necessary to my recovery, but it is trouble to me! Alas! the melancholy days I am confined to my bed, appear longer at Rome than they would any where else. I cannot refrain without difficulty from inspecting the wonders of this queen of cities. The more I consider them, the more easy am I to believe all that history has recorded of her glory. One reflection, however, somewhat consoles me in my affliction, and this is, that I regard what has happened to me as a just punishment from God, who, after having strengthened my wavering soul, has ordained that my body should suffer. My confessor treated me with too much lenity. I had need of this mortification to supply his deficiencies. If my accident grieves you, the fortitude with which I have borne my pain, ought to console you." As soon as he was able to leave his couch, he hastened to fulfil the objects of his pilgrimage, and received, he informed his friends, the greatest benefits from the sacred rites in which he participated.

In returning from Rome, he stopped some time at Arezzo, the place of his nativity, and was treated by the inhabitants with the greatest distinction.

While there, he had also the good fortune to discover a manuscript Quintilian, which he had long desired to find, but had hitherto been unsuccessful. As he was leaving the town, the respect which the people felt for him was still farther shown, and in a manner which greatly affected him. Taking him out of the direct road, they led him to a small house, and informed him that it was there he had first seen the light; that the proprietor had often attempted to make alterations in it, but that they had always prohibited it, and that it was now precisely in the same state as on the day when he was born.

When he arrived at Florence, he found his friends anxiously expecting him, and though the government had hitherto resisted the applications which had been made for the restoration of his paternal property, it was at length induced to reverse the decree of confiscation, and Boccaccio was sent to him shortly after his return to Padua with the intelligence, and also an invitation to him to accept the presidency of the University which had been lately established. Petrarch was grateful for this unexpected favour, and for some time appeared inclined to accept the office which had been offered him, but finally declined it.

From Padua he went to Venice, where he became acquainted with the celebrated Doge Andrea Dandolo, and exerted his eloquence to demonstrate the necessity of pacific measures with regard to Genoa, with which State Venice was on the point of commencing hostilities. He represented to Dandolo that Venice and Genoa together might for ever remain mistresses of the sea; that they were the luminaries of Italy; that a certain peace was far preferable to an uncertain victory, which, when won from a warlike nation, was always bloody; and that if they were desirous of exercising their valour, it would be infinitely better to turn their attention to the east, where a wide field was open for conquest, and on which they might spend the fire of their courage usefully. But his exhortations were useless. The Doge praised his zeal and eloquence, but pursued the line of action which he had marked out, indifferent as well to the warnings as to the persuasions of the orator.*

Though treated with respect approaching to veneration, in the places where he made his sojourn, and enjoying with unfailing delight the charms of his native country, the disturbances to which the incessant renewal of war exposed him, made him

* Baldelli.

desirous of escaping to a more tranquil abode. Vaucluse appeared to his fancy enriched with a thousand beauties, conferred only by the security and peace of its solitudes. The sorrow also which had overwhelmed him for the loss of Laura and his other friends, had subsided into the calm of tender recollection, and it seems not improbable that his resolution to revisit Vaucluse was in some measure inspired by the wish to recall her image more vividly to his mind, as she appeared to him when he first planted the rocky valley with laurels in honour of her name. Certain it is, that the sonnets which are supposed to have been composed about this period, are conspicuous for great beauty and tenderness.

But it was only for about a month after his return to France, that he remained free to enjoy the pleasures of Vaucluse. After having spent that short period there, he was obliged to attend the Court at Avignon, where he found the Pope and his followers in great agitation at the news which continued to arrive daily from Rome. The pontiff, who highly esteemed the wisdom of Petrarch, required him to give his advice as to the measures which ought to be pursued in the present posture of Italian affairs. He obeyed the summons,

and the epistle in which he unfolds his sentiments, is among the noblest productions of his pen. From his earliest years, his mind had been intent upon seeing Rome restored to the rights which belonged to her as the abode, first, of the wisest and mightiest of the earth, and next of the wisest and the holiest. Every Pope during whose reign he lived, heard his eloquent lamentations on the degradation of the eternal city. His language to them was free and even severe, and did we fail of other proofs to demonstrate the elevation of his mind, the boldness and noble enthusiasm with which he addressed the Pontiffs on these occasions, would be sufficient for our purpose. The interest also with which we read his harangues is increased tenfold by our knowledge that on this subject he spoke, without the slightest variation, from the true sentiments of his heart. At Avignon he might have enjoyed as much wealth and distinction as would have satisfied the most ambitious: he had at his command the highest offices of the Pontifical Court; and his genius might have found profitable opportunities for exerting itself in warring with the licentiousness of those who surrounded him, till he had produced a reform: but no consideration either of ambition, or vanity, or love, all of which exercised no little

influence on his mind, could prevail in the slightest degree when the restoration of Rome, or the tranquillity of Italy was concerned. His country was the true rival of his mistress, and to render it happy, the most enduring passion of his bosom. It is hence that his appeals to the Popes were so powerful, and that he dared to speak without hesitation or reserve.

But his pen was about the same time engaged in a less dignified employment than writing epistles which were intended to change the whole aspect of ecclesiastical Europe. Clement happening to be taken sick, applied, as usual, to his physicians for relief. Not, however, finding them able to overcome the disorder or agree among themselves, he informed Petrarch of the circumstance, and asked his advice. Whether out of the mere pride of learning, or, as was not uncommon in that age with men of letters, he really possessed a superior knowledge of medicine, he immediately wrote to the Pope accusing the physicians, in no measured terms, of the grossest ignorance. Clement, for the jest's sake perhaps, showed the letter to the parties alluded to, and the unfortunate writer immediately found himself in a nest of hornets, whose stings he would have gladly avoided

had it been in his power. But this not being possible, he resolved to make the best defence in which wit, or learning, or even abuse could aid him. Several treatises were the consequence of this resolution, but only one of them remains; and from its character, it is generally regarded as a fortunate circumstance for the reputation of Petrarch that no more of his "Invectives," as he terms the work, are in existence, his passion having got the better of his taste and good-breeding during its composition.*

Soon after involving himself in this ridiculous controversy he again retired to Vaucluse, where solitude, and the uninterrupted enjoyment of tranquillity, speedily restored his mind to its accustomed state of feeling. He was still residing there when intelligence was brought him of the death of Clement, who was succeeded by Innocent VII. a man whose ignorance was so great that he could not be made to believe that Petrarch was not a magician, as he made Virgil so constantly his study. The friends of our poet had done every thing in their power to make him accept the office of pontifical secretary, which Clement, a short time previous to his death, had again offered him.

* Ginguené.

He refused it with the same firmness as formerly, but his rejection was not allowed to be founded on any valid reason, and he was at last driven to make use of an observation which some critics had passed upon his style, and confess that his manner of writing was too florid for the concise and unadorned documents which should proceed from an apostolic secretary. To this it was immediately answered that he could easily simplify his style, and he was compelled to make the trial; but so strongly did he tincture his first official paper with high-sounding expressions, that he succeeded in effecting his delivery almost as soon as his liberty was threatened. On the accession, however, of the new Pope his friends determined to renew the attack; but it was still more impossible than ever to move him, and he remained shut up in his cottage, refusing all intreaties to return to Avignon, even to see his Holiness, so great was the dislike he had conceived for his character.

Besides writing several of his most admired sonnets during his present residence at Vaucluse, he carried on a very extensive correspondence with his friends in Italy, all appealing to him for advice in their affairs, whether public or private, of any

difficulty, and always receiving from him answers which proved the readiness of his zeal and affection in their service. It is also to this period his "Epistle to Posterity" is ascribed, though not without controversy, and his whole time seems to have been as fully occupied with literary pursuits as in the most active portion of his youth.

Having thus spent the latter part of 1352, and the spring of the following year, in a manner perfectly suited to his taste, his eyes were again turned affectionately towards Italy, whither he shortly determined to proceed without delay. But the invitations he received from his acquaintances in opposite directions, kept him undecided as to the line of his journey. Naples, Venice, and Rome had all equal claims upon his regard, and he had crossed the Alps before he could fix on the place of his future residence. In this state of uncertainty he reached Milan, where he intended to remain a few days and then resume his journey. But Giovanni Visconti was at that time archbishop and lord of Milan, and his love of learning and its professors was too great to suffer such a man as Petrarch to leave his city unless called away by great necessity. In the

most gracious manner, therefore, he pressed him to prolong his stay, and make Milan his home. Petrarch, resisted his arguments as long and resolutely as he could, but finding Giovanni impenetrable to excuses, he was obliged to yield to his persuasions.

He had no reason to repent of having done so. A house was prepared for him in the healthiest part of the town, and he was suffered to live in every respect as his inclination prompted. He had neither office nor title, nor duties to perform; and though honoured with admission to the council-table whenever he chose to take his seat at it, he was neither obliged to attend, nor forced to burthen himself with any part of the business when present. This was the way to preserve Petrarch contented with his residence, and Giovanni never better proved himself an able politician than in his behaviour to his celebrated guest. Such treatment was the more flattering to the poet, as his host had the character of being the haughtiest and most absolute of Italian princes. His severe and resolute policy, to which he owed his elevation and the preservation of his power, made him regarded as the tyrant of Lombardy; and when the Pope attempted to humble him by attacking

him as a bishop, he proudly intimated to the legate that, whenever necessary, he could support his spiritual with his temporal power. His three nephews, Matteo, Barnabo, and Galeazzo, vied with their uncle in showing respect to Petrarch, whose situation was thus rendered in the highest degree felicitous.

After enjoying several months of tranquillity, he was requested by Giovanni in 1354, to undertake an embassy to Venice, in order to persuade that Republic from pursuing hostilities against the Genoese, now greatly humbled, and relying on him for support. Petrarch, as we have seen, was already well known to the Doge, and possessed the advantage of many acquaintances at his court; he, therefore, encouraged himself with the hope of almost certain success, and of thus having it in his power to prove his esteem for a prince who had so hospitably entertained him. But his eloquence and connexions again proved unavailing. Andrea Dandolo persisted, as before, in following his own counsels; and Venice, by a change in the tide of affairs, was in a short time placed in the same condition as Genoa had been when that state solicited the interference of the Visconti.

Petrarch was greatly hurt at the failure of his

mission, but the feeling of disappointment was quickly lost in one of a deeper kind, as soon after his return he had to regret the death of his kind and generous host. The three nephews of Giovanni, already mentioned, succeeded to his authority, and in Galeazzo especially, Petrarch found another friend and patron.

These events were followed by the arrival at Mantua of the Emperor Charles IV. on whom Petrarch had placed his best hopes for Italy. He had no sooner arrived than the poet was summoned to the Imperial presence. During the whole of the time that Charles remained at Mantua, he was his constant companion, and every moment that could be stolen from public business the monarch devoted to the enjoyment of his conversation. Petrarch's account of their interviews, in one of his epistles, is highly interesting, as showing the perfect freedom with which the discourse was carried on, and which did honour to the Emperor as well as to Petrarch; to the former, for the respect he manifested towards genius—to the latter for the sense of self-respect, which he preserved in whosever presence he might be. The Emperor received him, he says, in a manner which partook neither of imperial pride, nor of the etiquette

common to the Germans. He never made him feel the superiority of his rank, but lived with him as if he had been his equal. He spoke of his works and manifested a wish to see them, especially that on Illustrious Men. To this Petrarch replied, that it was not yet completed, and that he required time and quiet to put the last hand to it. Upon which Charles intimated that he should be glad to have it appear under his name; "But," says the poet, "I answered with that freedom which nature has given me, and which age and custom have confirmed and authorized,—'Great Prince, to have it appear, and under your name, there is need of virtue on your part and of leisure on mine.'" Astonished, as was natural in a monarch, at an answer so little flattering, the Emperor desired him to explain his meaning; to which Petrarch replied, that much time was requisite for a work which was to comprise much in a little space; and that with regard to the dedication, he must labour to merit having his name placed at the head of the work; that it was not sufficient to wear a crown and possess a lofty title, but that he must possess the virtues and perform the great actions which might worthily place him among the illustrious men whose portraits he was

describing. "Live," continued he, "according to their example, in order that after having read their lives, your actions may render yours worthy of being read by posterity." The Emperor smiled, but looked far from being displeased at the freedom of this exhortation; and Petrarch took the opportunity of presenting him with some medals, among which was one of Augustus, in very excellent preservation, and on which the countenance of the Roman seemed as if breathing. "See," said he, as he presented them, "the great men whose place you occupy. These medals were very dear to me; I would not have given them to any one else, but you have a right to them. I know the heroes whom they represent, I know what they have done; it is not sufficient for you to know them, you must imitate them." He then gave him a short account of their lives, mixing up the details with observations calculated to excite a desire in Charles to follow their steps, to which the Emperor listened with great urbanity.

In another conversation which they had together, he requested Petrarch to give him an account of his life, which, after some resistance, the latter consented to do. "He heard me with attention," says he, "and, if I omitted some circumstances, either

through forgetfulness or a fear of wearying him, he reminded me of them. I was astonished to find him better acquainted than myself with many little anecdotes of my life. I know not what wind had carried the smoke beyond the Alps to eyes which are only open to see the faults and errors of others." Charles next inquired what mode of life pleased him best; to which Petrarch answered, a solitary one, as the most secure, the most tranquil, and in every respect the most suited to his disposition—that he should gladly seek this mode of living in the places where it could be most perfectly enjoyed, on mountains and in forests; but that, if he were prevented from doing this, he would endeavour to enjoy it in the best manner he could in cities. The Emperor smiled, and said that he had wished to bring him to this subject, as he hoped to convince him of his being in error as to some points connected with it. Petrarch bade him be cautious how he proceeded, as he would not fight with equal arms, the subject having long occupied his thoughts. "I have long reflected, and written much upon it," said he; "my head is full of reasons and authorities. I should not fear to meet Chrysippus himself, armed with all his syllogisms. I am well aware that people in general do not

think with me; but I have experience, a great master, on my side, and it is not fitting that a great Prince should think like the vulgar. I am so sure that I am correct, that I would take as arbitrators between you and me, even the inhabitants of cities to decide who is right. I have written a little treatise on the subject."—"I know you have," said Charles, laughing; "and, if I could meet with that book, I would throw it into the fire."—"I will take care that it shall not fall into your hands," replied the poet, who confesses that the Emperor showed a surprising force and energy in his arguments.

The farewell which Petrarch took of the Emperor was very much in accordance with the spirit of their conversations. Having accompanied the Imperial cortege about five miles beyond Placentia, he prepared to return to Milan, when Charles again desired that he would accompany him to Rome. The request was again firmly resisted; and, while they were contending, a gentleman of the suite came up, who, taking Petrarch by the hand, and looking at the same time earnestly in the Emperor's face, said to the latter, "This is the man of whom I have so often spoken to you; he will sing

your praises, if you deserve them; but remember, he knows both how to speak and how to be silent!"

Charles still used many earnest persuasions to induce Petrarch to accompany him to Rome; but the latter excused himself with a firmness which convinced the Emperor that entreaties were vain. It is not improbable that Petrarch discovered, in the course of their interviews, the weakness and vacillation of his views, and that, disappointed in his expectations of finding in him a man fit to deliver Italy from its trammels, he ceased to be gratified with his company. Whether this was or was not the cause of his refusal to join him in his journey, he was soon convinced, if he had already become doubtful respecting Charles's character, that his doubts were just: for that Prince, after spending a few months uselessly in Italy, returned to Germany, having reaped in his expedition only the scorn and ridicule of those who hoped to find in him a deliverer.

Petrarch received intelligence of this event from his friend Lælius, and lost no time in convincing Charles that he had but spoken the truth when he assured him that he would only give him praise as he should find him deserving it. "I dare not

say all I would," exclaims he, after accusing him of ingratitude, as well as folly, " or all I ought to say. Your departure has the appearance of a flight, and must have caused a vexation which I do not wish to increase. I cannot conceive how you could act in a manner which both reason and virtue condemn; which afflicts every one whose praise is worth enjoying; which has thrown the whole Empire into affliction, and which only rebels and the lowest of the people can applaud. But go, as it is your will; only remember that no prince before you ever renounced so fair, so glorious a hope, or one so near being accomplished. Already master of Rome, you sigh after Bohemia! Your father did not thus: but, alas! I see too plainly that virtue is not hereditary! I do not dispute with you on your knowledge of the science of government, or on your military talents. You have given many proofs that you possess a large share of both; but the will and the emulation fail you, which are so necessary to the conception and performance of all glorious actions. Hear what your grandfather and father would say, if they met you as you repass the Alps. 'You have gained much, great Cæsar! by a journey so long expected, and a return so precipitate! You bring with you the

crown of iron, the crown of gold, and an empty title. You are styled Emperor of the Romans, though you are truly only King of Bohemia:—would to Heaven you were not even that! If your ambition were restrained within the narrowest bounds, you would make, perhaps, some attempt at raising yourself—your wants would excite you to recover your patrimony.' Lælius has brought me your adieus;—they have been to me like the stroke of a dagger. He has brought me, as a present from you, an antique, which bears the image of Cæsar stamped upon it. If this medal could have spoken, would it not have exhorted you not to make this disgraceful retreat? Farewell, Cæsar! compare that which you are quitting with that which you seek!"

Petrarch, disconcerted in the object so dear to him, continued to reside at Milan, whence he again wrote to the Emperor, accusing him, in the most vehement style, of having deserted a cause he was bound to support, and heaped upon himself indelible disgrace by his indolence and indifference. This address, it seems, though violent in the extreme, was borne by the Emperor with philosophic calmness: and, when Petrarch was sent by Galeazzo Visconti to Prague, in the year 1356, he

received from him the most kind and affable treatment. The object of his mission was to ascertain his intentions with respect to Milan, which he had threatened to invade; but the Ambassador had the satisfaction of returning to his friends with the welcome intelligence that this danger was not to be apprehended, as Germany demanded at that time the whole of Charles's attention. He had not been long returned to Milan when a diploma was sent him from the Emperor, constituting him a Count Palatine. The instrument was enclosed in a box of gold, which he bestowed with a proud liberality on the Chancellor of the Emperor, remaining fully contented with the honour of the title.

About the period when this dignity was conferred upon him, he formed the design of retreating from Milan to some spot in the neighbourhood, where he might be able to enjoy purer air, and be more retired while pursuing his studies. The events also which had lately taken place in the city might have some influence in leading him to this determination. The sudden death of Mattheo Visconti had caused the most lively sensation throughout the province, and a rumour was soon afloat that his death was owing to his brother Galeazzo. This

accusation appears to have been without any reasonable foundation; and, it is rightly observed, that we scarcely require a stronger proof of Galeazzo's innocence, than the circumstance that Petrarch continued to regard him as one of his most estimable friends. It is, however, not improbable that the bare existence of the suspicion might have rendered Milan and its court less agreeable to Petrarch than formerly, and that on this account he hastened once more into solitude.

The spot which Petrarch chose for his retreat was the little village of Garignano, on the river Adda, about three miles distant from Milan, and the country around which was lonely and picturesque. In this retirement, which was occasionally exchanged for the still deeper solitudes of a neighbouring monastery, he devoted all his thoughts to religious meditation: but the account which he has himself given of his manner of living, and his studies at this period, is too interesting to be passed over. It is in a letter to Guido da Settimo. "The tenor of my life," says he, "is tranquil and uniform, for I am no longer tormented by the passions which held me captive in my youth. But what do I say? It is the dew of heaven alone that has extinguished them; for how many old men do we not often see sunk

to the great dishonour of humanity, in gross licentiousness? Like a weary traveller, I redouble my steps as I approach the termination of my journey. I read and write day and night, and my only rest is in sometimes doing the one and sometimes the other. These are my sole occupations and my sole pleasures. My health is so strong, my body so robust, that neither a more mature age, nor more serious occupations, nor abstinence, nor scourges, could have rendered me less subservient to the passions with which I have so long waged war. All my hope is in the assistance of Jesus Christ. With regard to the gifts of fortune, I am equally distant from the two extremes; and indeed enjoy that mediocrity which is so much to be desired. In one thing only can I be an object of envy to others—which is, that I am more esteemed than many would wish me to be, and more so than wholly agrees with my quiet. Not only does the greatest Prince of Italy, with all his court, love and honour me, but his people even respect me much more than I deserve, and love me without either knowing or seeing me—for I rarely go out, which, however, may be the very reason why I am so esteemed. I have passed at Milan an olympiad, and begun the last year of a lustrum. The kind-

ness with which I am treated by every one, attaches me so much to Milan that I love the very houses, the air, and the walls, to say nothing of my friends and acquaintances. I live in a very remote corner of the city, towards the west. An ancient devotional custom brings all the people every Sunday to the church of St. Ambrosio, near which I reside. On other days the neighbourhood is a desert. Many persons whom I know, or who desire to know me, threaten to come and see me; but either detained by their business, or frightened by the distance, they never come. You see how many advantages I derive from fixing myself near this great saint. He consoles me by his presence —obtains for my soul the blessings of Heaven, and saves me from no slight annoyance. When I happen to go out, which very rarely occurs, either to perform my duty to my sovereign, or from any motive of convenience, I salute all to the right hand and to the left, with a simple bend of the head, without speaking, and without going to any one. Fortune has made no change in my food or sleep, and you know what they are. I even diminish them a little every day; so that, after a short time, there will hardly remain any thing to take away. I never seek my couch but for the

purpose of sleeping, unless I be ill. As soon as I am awake, I leap from it, and hasten into my library, which I often do in the middle of the night, especially when the nights are short, and I want to be up. I only yield to nature just as much as she absolutely demands, and that which cannot be refused her. Food, sleep, and amusement vary according to time and place. I love repose and solitude: thus to my friends I appear churlish, because I see them so rarely; but, when I do join them, I compensate for the silence of a year by the conversation of a day. For the present, I have taken a most delicious house in the country, near Milan, where the air is most delicious, and where I am at present residing. I pass the same life here as elsewhere, except that I am more free, and farther from annoyances than in the city. I want for nothing: the country people bring me plenty of fruit, fish, ducks, and vegetables of every kind. At a short distance there is a Carthusian Monastery, only lately built, where I can find, every hour of the day, the innocent pleasures afforded by religion. I desired to take up my lodging, as it were, in the cloister, and the good brothers consented, and even wished me to do so: but I have thought it better to fix myself at a short distance, but

near enough to be able to take part in their holy exercises. Their gate is always open to me—a privilege granted to very few. You, perhaps, wish to be informed respecting my fortune; and, if you doubt the reports you have heard respecting my riches, you shall now be told the truth. My income, I confess, is increased, but my expenses are increased also. You know me—I have never been either poorer or richer. Wealth, when it multiplies wants and desires, only produces poverty. I have, however, as yet experienced the contrary of this. The more I have had, the less have I desired—abundance has rendered me more tranquil and more moderate in my desires. I am not, however, certain what effect the possession of great wealth would have on my mind: it might produce, perhaps, the same consequences with me as with others." It has been justly observed, that nothing can be more interesting than to hear this great man thus unfolding the secrets of his heart.* This we have already seen him doing in his "Dialogues with St. Augustus:" but all professed treatises on the subject of personal feelings are to be received with doubt, as instead of pictures of the heart, they are, for the most part, apologies, and set both

* Tiraboschi.

events and sentiments only in such a light as is most favourable to their effect, and very rarely in their true and natural position. This is the case also with most auto-biographies, which have the additional bad effect of often preventing the lives of the individuals whom they commemorate from being written by less prejudiced and interested parties. But letters, like that of Petrarch's now quoted, are in general too much the produce of present, unpremeditated feeling, to come under this observation.

The principal work he composed during his retreat at Garignano, was the "Treatise De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ," written for the consolation of his old friend Azzo da Corregio, to whom he dedicated it, as a mark of friendship, constant and enduring through all the vicissitudes of time and fortune. But an accident happened to him about this period which kept him for some time from his usual pursuits. A large manuscript of "Cicero's Epistles," which he had copied with his own hand, was the constant companion of his leisure. By some carelessness, in passing the stand that supported the volume, which, being bound strongly in wood, was of considerable weight,

* Tiraboschi.

he let it fall several times on his left leg; the bruise thus occasioned ulcerated, and his medical attendants had begun to determine on the amputation of the limb, when the inflammation ceased, and a cure was effected.

The first use he made of his liberty was to go to Bergamo, on the invitation of a personage whose name has been immortalized by the circumstance. Henry Capra was a rich and noted watch-maker, possessing by nature a lively and penetrating mind, which he had diligently cultivated; but having begun his studies too late in life, he was more enthusiastical and fanciful than might have been expected from his age, or character. His greatest ambition was to know and be known to Petrarch, and he employed every means that this ambition could suggest to effect his purpose: the poet became acquainted with his wish, and good-naturedly said, "He shall have his desire gratified; it would be barbarous to refuse him that which will make him so happy, and cost me so little." Nothing could exceed the delight with which he received the intimation of Petrarch that he was willing to accept his acquaintance. He immediately employed persons to copy all the works of his illustrious friend; placed his arms and portrait in every

part of his house, and at last bade adieu to his profession, notwithstanding the advice of Petrarch on the subject, to devote himself entirely to letters. But he had not yet received a visit from the object of his veneration—this was all that he wanted to make his happiness complete. "Let him but honour my house with his presence for only one day," said he, "and I shall be happy and glorious through all ages." Some years, however, it seems passed away before the much-desired visit was paid. At length the happy day arrived which was to crown him with fame, and on the eighteenth of October 1358, Petrarch proceeded to Bergamo. The governor, and several of the chief inhabitants came out to meet him, and offer him a lodging in the palace. Poor Capra was in great distress while these invitations were being given. He had accompanied his friend from the commencement of the journey, and to secure him, had associated with himself some men of literature whose conversation might render the way less tedious. His anxiety was at last removed by Petrarch's declaring that he was the guest of Henry Capra solely, and that he would lodge no where but in his house! His reception there was such as might have been expected. The furniture of the chamber in which he

slept was all purple, and the bed superbly gilt, Capra declaring that no one had ever yet slept in it, or ever should again, except Petrarch. The next day our poet took his leave, but the watchmaker accompanied him a long way on the road, and was at last torn from him by violence, his friends fearing that the joy he had experienced would either make him ill or mad. Some time before this, a poor, blind old grammarian had walked over the best part of Italy to express the same feeling as Capra.

Petrarch shortly after made a journey to Padua and Venice, but in 1359 was again at Milan, where he was visited by Boccaccio, who passed with him several days to the great pleasure of both. Among the many topics on which these two celebrated men conversed during this meeting, religion appears to have been the principal one, the author of the "Decameron" having been till that period as licentious in his conduct, as in his productions; but receiving from Petrarch a new rule of action, which had great influence on his future life. Before they parted, the poet bestowed on him a copy of some of his works, among which were his Latin Eclogues, and it was in return for this present that Boccaccio sent him the copy of Dante, which he accompanied with so many praises of

that poet, that he subsequently found it necessary to justify them; Petrarch, it seems, having been supposed by many persons to be jealous of his fame. He thus vindicates himself from the charge in an answer to Boccaccio's letter.

"The praises which you give him are just and well deserved," says he, "worthy both of you and him, and infinitely more flattering than those applauses with which the populace disturb his manes. I applaud your verses, and join you in your praises of this great poet—common in his style, but very noble in his thoughts. One thing only displeases me in your letter; it is to see that you know me so little. What! can I help being charmed with the praises of illustrious men? Nothing is farther from me! Of all vices, envy is the last I could be guilty of. I call Heaven to witness, I am continually rendered miserable at seeing low mechanics even enjoying the advantages and respect which are denied to men of genius. I gladly seize this opportunity of confuting the charge made against me by my enemies of hating this great poet. Why should I hate him? I never saw him but once, or rather he was shown to me, and that in my childhood. He lived with my father and grandfather, older than the former, younger than the latter, and

the same storm drove them all the same day from their country. This similarity of fortune, joined to a union of tastes, united him in strict friendship with my father, but they took opposite courses: my father yielded to circumstances, and occupied himself with the care of his family; Dante, on the contrary, resisted them, and resolutely followed the route he had taken, thinking only of glory, and resigning every thing for it. Neither the injustice of his countrymen, nor private quarrels, nor exile, nor poverty, nor love of children or wife,—nothing could distract him from his studies, though poetry demands so much quiet and repose. I cannot too much admire him on this account. I see many reasons to love him, none to hate him, and yet fewer to despise him. Both his spirit and his style place him beyond the reach of any such feeling." He then explains the reason of his not having the works of this celebrated poet among his other books. One was, that he was principally occupied in searching for copies of ancient and rare works, and had thus neglected to procure those which he could obtain at any time without difficulty. Another was, that when he wrote in the vulgar language, which he did entirely at the commencement of his literary career, he was fearful that

should he study the productions of his great countryman, he might be led imperceptibly to imitate him. "There might be," says he, "too much presumption in the thought, but I wished to raise myself on my own wings, and without the support of others; to have a style and manner wholly my own; to be, in fact, original. Whether I have succeeded in this aim I must leave others to decide. No one can accuse me of being a plagiarist: if any thing should be found in my writings which resembles what has been said by another author, the resemblance is wholly casual. I have always avoided being a plagiarist or imitator with the greatest care. If shame or modesty had not made me do this, a certain degree of youthful pride would. But cured now, as I am, of the fear of being a copyist, I read any thing that comes in my way, and especially Dante, to whom I give the palm of vulgar eloquence." With regard to his ceasing to write ordinarily in the common language, he says, "I feared the fate which I see attending others who have written in Italian, and Dante more particularly, whose poems I have heard so marred in the lowest places of public resort; and I had no reason to hope that I could render my verses more flexible, or of easier pronunciation. The event has

proved that I was right: the poems I wrote when young are spread among the people, who repeat and disfigure them; that which I once admired, therefore, that is, to have my productions in every body's mouth, disgusts me now. It is horrible to hear one's verses marred in the repetition. Those who envy me wish to prove that I am envious of this poet. I have many times asserted that I envy no one; but I am not to be believed on my word. Let us examine then the truth. How can I envy a man who has passed all his life in producing works which formed the delight of my early youth; a man who made that his principal, his sole occupation, perhaps, which has only been for me an amusement, a gentle exercise of the mind. Tell me, I pray you, where was there any matter for envy?" It is chiefly in this last sentence we discover the true feeling of Petrarch when writing the above letter, the authenticity of which, however, has been strongly doubted.* By a notion, prevalent in his age, that Latin was the only fit medium for elevated thought, he had been induced, as we have seen, to employ it in all those works which he regarded as the true foundation stone of his fame. The reputation he enjoyed for learning

* Tiraboschi.

and philosophy was in reality much greater than that which he had obtained by his poetry, that at least written in the vulgar tongue, or Italian. Though his excellent taste, therefore, and knowledge of what is essential to good poetry, made him fully apprehend the merits of Dante, he might honestly believe his own superiority, aided in the misapprehension, not so much by vanity, or the reputation he enjoyed, as by his idea of the unsurpassable excellence of the Latin language, and of works of ability composed in it. Notwithstanding, however, this apology, which may in some measure explain the style of the letter, there is a degree of learned pride in its whole texture, which evidently shows that the writer was labouring with an idea of rivalship, which he would fain have wholly hidden from himself, or overcome by a species of refined self-deceit. Nor is it easy to conceive how a man should in a few years change so utterly from what he was, as to labour for the honour of a public triumph, and afterwards feel the most sovereign contempt for the popularity of his works. The love or desire of literary fame may possibly be overcome by age or personal misfortunes, though rarely even by these. But Petrarch, at the time he wrote so contemptuously of

the people's repeating his poems, was in the full pursuit of reputation; was studying and composing with as much diligence as ever, and by his own confession had changed in no particle of his character or nature, except as religion had put a chain upon his passions. The fame also which Dante enjoyed, though founded on his skill in the vulgar language, was by no means, at the period of which we are speaking, confined to the people or the unlearned. Not only were professorships already established at Florence, and other places, for the exposition of the "Commedia," but the greatest Princes had esteemed it an honour to have been the protectors of its author. His ashes were earnestly disputed for between the people of his own country and those of the State in which he died; and he had enjoyed, even in his lifetime, a fame sufficiently great to enable him to address nations and monarchs with confidence of attention. It is, therefore, not altogether easy to comprehend the expressions of indifference which Petrarch affected to feel for his great predecessor; nor to believe that he could be expressing his real feelings when he spoke of him as employing his whole life and powers in doing that which had been to him only a light and passing amusement. It is vex-

atious to have even a suspicion that so great a man as he whose actions we are reviewing, could wish to undervalue one who had done so much for literature as Dante; but the above letter, if genuine, can scarcely be read without its exciting that suspicion, however Petrarch himself might have resisted the feeling which it seems to express.

In the following year he was deputed by his friend Galeazzo to congratulate King John of France, who had been taken prisoner at Poictiers, on his delivery from captivity. The regret he felt at the spectacle which Paris presented after the calamities it had suffered was lively and sincere, and the affectionate regard with which he was received by the King and the Dauphin made a deep impression on his mind. To the presents with which they loaded him were added the most urgent requests that he would make Paris his home; but neither these intreaties nor those of the Emperor, which he received shortly after, could persuade him to forsake Italy, whither he returned as soon as the object of his embassy was fulfilled.

The ravages of a contagion and the alarms of a civil war prevented him from continuing at Milan,

and he was obliged to change his residence to Padua. Here new invitations arrived from the Emperor, and from his friends at Naples and Avignon. The former was successful in his wishes, and Petrarch had proceeded as far as Milan on his journey into Germany, when he found himself stopped by the disturbed state of the country through which he had to pass. He therefore returned to Padua, but the plague raging there, he removed to Venice, whither he carried his library, which he is said to have always taken with him whenever he changed his place of abode. But in the present instance he had another motive for so doing besides his own convenience. It was his intention to bestow the whole collection, a very valuable and extensive one, on some monastery; this design, however, he in some measure changed, and soon after his arrival at Venice he formed the determination of offering it to the Republic. The offer was very graciously accepted, and by a decree of the State, the palace of the Two Towers, since converted into the monastery of St. Sepulchre, was devoted to the reception of the poet and his library. To the regret of all subsequent ages, the treasures which he had collected with so much

care and labour, and which it was among the chief object of his declining years to see safely preserved, have all been dispersed or destroyed.

He had not been long at Venice when he received another visit from Boccaccio, whom the plague had driven from Florence, and whose visit was rendered even more agreeable to his friend by his bringing with him the learned Greek, Lentio Pilato, one of the most singular as well as one of the most erudite men of the age. Boccaccio describes him as having a countenance positively hideous, and which was rendered still more frightful by a long beard, and black uncombed hair. His manners were in accordance with his looks; but both his appearance and behaviour were atoned for, in the opinion of scholars, by his profound knowledge of Greek, in all the legendary as well as historical treasures of which language he was greatly conversant. Boccaccio procured for this singular man the professorship of Greek at Florence, in which situation he lectured more than two years on Homer, giving private lessons to his friend in his own house, and making a translation of the Iliad and part of the Odyssey into Latin.

But at this period an event occurred which

again inspired Petrarch with the feelings which had so long possessed his mind in the earlier years of his life. Innocent VI. died on the twelfth of September 1362, and the following month Urban V. ascended the pontifical throne, and gave the advocates of Rome reason to expect that he would, at no great distance of time, remove the court to its ancient seat. But the pleasure which this intelligence occasioned Petrarch, was surpassed by the grief he suffered about the same time for the loss of his friend Azzo da Corregio, and more especially for that of his early acquaintances Lælius and Simonides, who died of the plague at Naples. These sorrows were not a little increased by troubles of a different kind, which agitated the mind of Petrarch at nearly the same time. His high reputation, it appears, had raised against him several literary enemies, who, by their severe criticisms on his works, either thought to do justice to the public, or hoped to snatch away some of the fame which belonged to their renowned contemporary. These censures referred principally to his "Eclogues," and to some parts of his poem of Africa, both which works offered many temptations for severe criticism; but

that with which they were assailed seems to have been dictated by a feeling of envy rather than by the jealousy of a pure taste.

These afflictions and annoyances were, however, in some measure compensated by the honours he received from the State of Venice. A revolt having occurred in the Isle of Candia, and the Government being in need of a skilful commander for their troops, Petrarch wrote to the General of the Visconti, and had the good fortune not only to obtain his services but to see them crowned with the most brilliant success. While the war was going on, he had visited Bologna and Padua, and was only lately returned when he saw, from the windows of his palace, a galley gaily adorned, and filled with sailors bearing laurel crowns on their heads, skim rapidly into port. The clamours of the people soon announced that it brought tidings of a complete victory over the Candians. Public thanksgivings were offered up in the church of St. Mark, during which our poet had his seat on the right hand of the Doge, and many days of general rejoicings followed, which he described in letters to his friends.

In the year 1366 Petrarch, who had received intelligence of the disposition which Urban mani-

fested to reform the church, sent him an epistle which was as remarkable for severity and boldness of style as that which he wrote to the Emperor. Far, however, from treating this address with the anger which all persons about the court expected it would excite, Urban is supposed to have been instigated by it to determine on a speedy removal to Rome, which resolution he put in practice, and arrived there in October 1367. Petrarch expressed his joy at the event by a letter as full of praise and congratulations, as that which he had before sent was of severe counsel. It was not long, however, before he saw reason to dread that the quarrels of the Pontiff with the Visconti and other princes, would deluge Italy with blood: he endeavoured to negotiate for his friend Galeazzo, but was unsuccessful.

This circumstance, however, did not prevent him from wishing to accept the pressing invitation with which Urban called him to Rome. The great obstacle to the journey was a rapid decline in his bodily strength; but even this was not allowed to deter him, and having employed the winter in making preparations for the undertaking, among which was the writing of his will, he set out in the month of April 1370. He had only reached

Ferrara when his indisposition assumed a more serious character. He fell to the ground, and remained without sense or motion for more than thirty hours. The princes of Este received him into their palace, and having recovered from his swoon he endeavoured to continue his journey, but the effort was made in vain; his strength utterly failed him, and he was conveyed back to Padua in a litter.

Convinced by this warning of the rapid decline of his constitution, he resolved to fix himself in some retired spot where he might pass the remainder of his days without any farther interruption to his repose. The village of Arqua, four leagues distant from Padua, and situated on a gentle declivity among the Euganean hills, attracted his attention, by the beauty of the surrounding scenery and the exquisite softness of the climate. Here, therefore, he erected a small but pleasant and convenient house, settled his daughter and her husband with him, and as soon as his health was a little recovered, again commenced his literary labours. The immediate object of his attention was the conclusion of the treatise, "De Ignorantia sui ipsius et Multorum," begun three years before, and principally intended to confute the bigoted disciples

of Aristotle and Averroes, who abounded in Venice, and some of whom, in a dispute he held with them during his residence there, had observed, that "he was a very good man but no scholar."

Petrarch seemed fated never to enjoy repose for a continuance. He had scarcely become settled in his retreat at Arqua, when a war between the Venetians and the Paduans compelled him to retreat to the capital, the open country being already infested with the forces of the enemy. At Padua he met with a young lawyer, who told him that a French monk had lately published a severe critique on his letter to Urban V. His reply to this adversary is regarded as wholly unworthy of a man whose philosophy and good taste should have taught him temperance. But the continuance of the war called his attention to other subjects. Padua was on the point of falling into the hands of the Venetians, and the prince had no other means of averting the ruin but powerful intercession with his enemies, and an acknowledgment of submission. Knowing the esteem in which Petrarch was held by the Republic, he earnestly intreated him to undertake a mission to Venice as his representative before the senate. The poet consented: in company with the younger Carrara,

he set forth on this unpromising embassy, and the day after his arrival at Venice was allowed an audience. But either his strength or his resolution failed him on this occasion, for he was unable to deliver his address, and the assembly had, consequently, to be convened the next day. His eloquence then seemed to have regained the vigour and brilliancy for which it was remarkable in the best period of his career; the Venetians heard him with expressions of delight, and he returned to Arqua with a treaty which put an end to hostilities.

His feeble constitution suffered considerably from this exertion, and a slow fever, which preyed continually upon his strength, threatened to put a speedy termination to life. But he would neither cease from his literary labours, change his poor diet, nor attend in any way to the instructions of his physicians. The disorder, thus left to itself, and his decaying frame receiving nothing to resist its ravages, he became every day more languid; and it was in this feeble state that he, for the first time, read the Decameron of his friend Boccaccio, —this being another instance of the remarkable indifference which he manifested through life for the productions of his most celebrated contemporaries.

Shortly after he had read the work, parts of which, especially the story of Griselida, greatly delighted him, he wrote to Boccaccio, informing him of his general admiration of the book, praising him for his elegance of style, and finding an excuse for the freedom of the pictures in the manners of the age. The day after writing this letter, July 18th, 1374, he had retired to his library, as usual, and with the intention of relieving the languor he suffered by his customary studies; but one of his servants, on entering the room soon after, saw him sitting with his head resting on the book he had been reading, and, on going up to him, found that he was dead.

Intelligence of this event was no sooner made public, than Padua and its neighbourhood expressed the most general sorrow. Both the nobles and the people sought to manifest their veneration for the man who had obtained the reputation of being one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived, as well as the most elegant of poets. His funeral was attended with almost more than royal pomp. Among the mourners were the Prince of Padua, the Archbishop, the Abbots, Priests, Monks, and Friars of the neighbouring churches and monasteries—the whole population of the city and district—all the noblemen and knights, the doc-

tors and scholars who were at that time in the city. The body was carried on a bier, spread with cloth of gold, and covered with a canopy of gold, lined with ermine. It was received in the church with the most solemn ceremonies employed on such occasions, and a sermon was preached over it by Bonaventura of Paraga, who was subsequently created a Cardinal.*

In reviewing this sketch of the life of Petrarch, the feeling with which we regard his character can hardly fail to be that of admiration, mingled with much affection as well as respect. His career was marked at the beginning with many weaknesses, and he more than once yielded to the solicitations of passion, when its indulgence was to contradict the principles by which he professed to be governed. The nature of his intentions towards Laura herself were, as he intimates, not originally so pure as became the esteem in which he held her character:—his perseverance in the pursuit of her affections, under any plea, could not be justified, even to himself, considering they were already justly and inalienably due to another. There is, therefore, ample room for exercising severe reproof in our estimate of Petrarch's character and con-

* Tiraboschi. De Sade.

duct, when viewed only for the purpose of seeing how they can stand the full light of pure, sinless truth. But, when regarding this great man, not from a spiritual judgment-throne, but as walking with him on the same level, and having the same objects with which to compare our moral stature and fulness, how few men are there who can fairly shut their hearts to the love with which his virtues should inspire them, marred and clouded though they sometimes were, by misindulged passions! The confessions which men make of their feelings and the motives of their actions, are not always to be taken, as I have observed, for true pictures. But, even with this drawback, the writings of Petrarch are so replete with intimations respecting the situation of his mind—the working of his thoughts—the conflicts he was continually waging with his inclinations, that no one, perhaps ever passed from the earth leaving so many materials with posterity for judging of his character. And with these before us, our reasons for admiring it seem to multiply every time we renew the examination. Beneath his passion for fame we can discover more deeply seated the love of country, —the ambition to see it free and happy, and the resolution to speak in its cause when all other

tongues faltered or were silent. When yielding to inclinations which ought to have been suppressed in their origin, the error was followed neither by indifference nor a wish to justify it, but by painful struggles to overcome temptation in the future, and by a deep and earnest penitence. With the little weaknesses to which an occasional outbreaking of personal vanity exposed him, we may fairly contrast that love of solitude which so often led him from the world, where he might have been loaded every day of his life with the incense of flattery—that noble and sedate contemplativeness, which gave him an elevation of thought and spirit scarcely reached by any of his contemporaries—and that ingenuous and ready acknowledgment of error which made him despise the little arts of concealment and perversion, to which inferior and less virtuous minds have recourse. He was, in short, human, and prone to some of the most dangerous of human passions—but he at the same time possessed the qualities that make the word humanity a synonyme for all that is most gracious and amiable in nature. But, to consider his character as an author as well as a man:—

Petrarch's reputation has now for many years rested solely on his Italian poems, which, as has

been remarked, occupy less than two hundred pages out of thirteen hundred, of which the folio volume containing his works consists.* The opinions formed by different writers on the celebrated productions of his muse have been widely opposite; and, while one class of authors have held him up as a model of excellence, another have reprobated every approach to his style as a sacrifice of truth and nature. It is not difficult to account for these contradictory estimates of Petrarch's poetry. He was acknowledged by his contemporaries to be the most learned man of his age, and his Latin productions had acquired him universal reputation. The Italian language, though employed so successfully by Dante, was still unsettled, and far from being generally esteemed among scholars, or those who pretended to superior taste. While a language is in such a state, a man of great erudition and acknowledged genius has it in his power to give laws to the common diction of his countrymen, and the works he composes in it will be regarded as models for future writers. Petrarch was abundantly qualified for acquiring this influence. His natural taste would have taught him to reject rude or inharmonious expressions in whatever lan-

* See Edition Basileæ, 1581.

guage he wrote: his study of the classics had made him acquainted with the best methods of collocating words and sentences; and his mind, fertile in invention, and richly stored with ideas, both original and acquired, could scarcely employ a language without improving it, by enlarging its phraseology, giving a more elegant turn to its idioms, or rendering them more exact and musical. This, Petrarch effected, and it is not surprising, therefore, that his style was regarded as a model of classical Italian, or that writers such as Bembo, who considered the poets of Greece and Rome as alone worthy of imitation, should place him at the head of Italian poets. But when, on the other hand, he was compared by the admirers of Dante or Ariosto, with those great masters of a bolder and more impassioned style, his elegance and variety of expression, the delicacy of his imagery, and his harmonious versification were treated with contempt, because a species of excellence was looked for which Petrarch's poetry very rarely possesses.

Studying his productions without being influenced by either the one or the other of these prejudices, we find them possessing a charm sufficient to soothe and delight us, but not to awaken passion, or give birth to any feeling of power and sublimity. If they

were intended to convey an idea that the writer was under the influence of strong emotion, they are, in that respect, undoubted failures; for there is little poetry of any repute that makes a less vivid impression on the feelings. But it is not essential to all amatory poetry that it should be uniformly expressive of violent or intense excitement. The deepest seated passion is not always the readiest to reveal itself, and the lover may adore his mistress without addressing her in their ordinary intercourse in the language of ecstasy. In any case, Petrarch would seldom write in a highly impassioned style; and those who have most censured him for want of warmth and energy, should have first considered the circumstances under which he composed his poetry. However strong his love might be for Laura, his respect for her was equal to his love; and, whether he intended the sonnets he wrote for her eye only, or for that of the world at large, he would scarcely address her in a manner unbecoming her situation and the purity of her character. Still farther: — Petrarch had rarely any means of addressing Laura but by his verses; and, from the commencement of his passion to her death, he employed them as the common medium of communicating his sentiments. It was not merely on great

occasions, when taking long farewells, or inspired with some sudden emotion, that he thus addressed her. Not a week, perhaps, passed without his writing on the subject of his love, and he was sufficiently Platonic while breathing forth his verse to believe that his spirit held communion with that of Laura. He wrote sonnets, in fact, not to make known his love, but to console himself under its disappointments: denied the pleasure of conversing with her who possessed his affections, he sought to deceive himself into the momentary belief of her presence, and he wrote as if he were speaking in the hearing of one who was day after day listening to his voice; whom he loved deeply, but to whom the strong language of passion would have been ill applied in this daily intercourse of thought.

Whether, therefore, we consider the situation of Laura, or the feeling which prompted Petrarch to dedicate such a multiplicity of sonnets to her name, we may find a reason for their being less expressive of strong emotion than many critics would have wished. In the one instance he would have offended against the modesty of her whom he addressed; in the other, he would have written with more apparent vigour, but not in a manner more truly expressive of deep feeling. The heart be-

comes in time familiar with passion, as the body, it is said, may do with pain; and as the sufferer, who at the first feeling of anguish, expresses himself in loud cries, but afterwards only in the low murmur of complaint, so passion of any kind uses a calmer language when of many years' continuance; and we might properly suspect its sincerity, if, after being long experienced, it spoke in the same tone as at first. The latest of Petrarch's sonnets are acknowledged to be his best. Laura's situation prohibited his expressing himself in a manner natural to the state of his feelings when first enamoured; but as his emotions became subdued, and her image grew familiar to his thoughts, he wrote with more ease and pathos, because with more freedom.

If we may thus account for the subdued style of Petrarch's amatory poetry, it lays claim for its other qualities to the highest praise. In what compositions shall we find more pleasing imagery, tenderer sentiments, or superior versification? Laura, it is true, is the constant theme, but it is only by the repetition of her name that the poet tires our patience. She appears before us adorned with some new grace in every sonnet, and though love only inspires the sentiments, they are almost infinitely varied in the expression. Sometimes yielding en-

tirely to his fancy; at others availing himself of his learning, Petrarch was never at a loss for the ornaments of verse, and he not unfrequently abounds in the most beautiful figures and comparisons: but the chief charm of his Sonnets is the soft and tranquil melancholy which breathes in both the thoughts and language—a gentleness of spirit which makes us feel that they could only have been written by a man delighting and living much in solitude. The air of Vaucluse seems fanning us as we read, and the murmur of its fountains, the song of birds in its laurel shades, and the sighs of the poet, steal pleasantly upon the imagination.

No poetry without being either descriptive, impassioned, or romantic, ever gained so strong a hold on both the feelings and the fancy as Petrarch's. His Sonnets are read with delight by persons who would turn with contempt from the amatory verses of other writers, and the greatest admirers of such poetry find a beauty in them which they look for in vain in any other of the kind. The sentiments of an elevated mind, rather imbued with passion than conquered by it, loving meditation the more because it has experienced agitation, and conscious of a pleasure in loving which exists

independent of hope, or its other appliances—the sentiments of a mind like this find their way into all hearts, and by their mild and quiet influence, often make a deeper impression than others of a more stirring character. It is hence that the Sonnets of Petrarch possess such a power of charming us; that they have so long retained their popularity, and have been taken as models by so many writers, but have scarcely ever been successfully imitated.

Petrarch's other poetry, his "Canzoni" and "Trionfi," are more imaginative, and written altogether in a bolder strain, but they abound too much in allegory and classical allusion, to be agreeable to modern taste; and though there are passages in them which strike us with admiration for their force and brilliancy, they are far from possessing the same charm as the Sonnets. This observation may be applied with still greater propriety to his Latin poetry, which, notwithstanding the time and care he expended in its composition, has been long forgotten by the world. His prose works, which are all in Latin, are in many respects valuable. Though his style is not purely classical, it is clear and energetic, and, acquainted as he was with the best writers of antiquity, and the fathers of the

Christian Church, besides being constantly reflecting on the subjects which employed his pen, a most valuable volume might be compiled from the best portions of his miscellaneous Treatises and Epistles. The following list of his productions will suffice to show how various and laborious were his literary pursuits. I place them as they stand in the edition of 1581. 1. De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ. 2. De Vita Solitaria. 3. De Otiis Religiosorum. 4. De Vera Sapientia. 5. De Contemptu Mundi. 6. Psalmi Penitentiales. 7. De Republica Opt. Administranda. 8. De Officiis et Virtutibus Imperatoriis. 9. Rerum Memorandarum lib. iv. 10. Vitarum Virorum Epitome. 11. Liber Augustalis. 12. De Pacificanda Italia Exhortatio ad Carolum IV. &c. 13. Ad Mi. Laurentii de Capessenda Libertate, Hortatoria. 14. De Obedientia ac fide Uxoria, Mythologia. 15. De Avaritia Vitanda. 16. Itinerarium Syriacum. 17. Epistolæ Familiares. 18. Ad Viros quosdam e Veteribus Illustriores. Epistolæ de Rebus Senilibus. Epistolæ Variæ. 19. De Ignorantia sui ipsius et Multorum. 20. Apologia contra Galli Calumnias. Invectivæ contra Medicum. 21. De Sumenda et Recepta Laurea poetica. 22. Æglogæ duodecem. Africa. Epistolæ Poeticæ.

The Life of Boccaccio.

Boccaccio.

The family of Boccaccio was originally of Certaldo, a town situated in the vale of Elsa, but owing to his commercial engagements, the father of Giovanni, Boccaccio di Chellino di Buonaiuto, following the example of his predecessors, found it necessary to settle in Florence, where he amassed some wealth, and filled many of the most important offices in the Republic. Not, however, being of a disposition to confine himself to that city, he travelled to France, and during his residence in Paris, became acquainted with a lady, who is described as occupying a rank between that of the nobility and the commonalty.* The fruit of

* Baldelli. Filippo Villani.

this connexion was the subject of the present memoir; shortly after giving birth to whom, in the year 1313, the unfortunate lady died, leaving no record of her name, but a child who was to render himself illustrious through many generations. Her lover remained but a short time in Paris after this event, and returned to Florence, taking the little Giovanni with him.

The docility of disposition and remarkable aptitude for learning which distinguished the first years of his youth, charmed his father, who, at a very early period, conceived hopes of his future celebrity. Before he was seven years old, and without knowing what poetry was, he composed verses, which seemed to flow almost involuntarily from his lips. His first master, Giovanni da Strada, was an accomplished and experienced scholar, but his father, though admiring the capacity he evinced for learning, removed him from this teacher of Latin before he had completed his course, and placed him with a mathematician, who was to instruct him in arithmetic. As soon as he had acquired a sufficient stock of this species of learning, he was apprenticed to a respectable merchant, with whom he passed six years, but derived little profit from his example or instruction.

While completing his mercantile education, he is supposed to have visited with his master both Naples and Paris; but whether he had little success in his transactions, or in any other way disgusted his employer, the latter was accustomed to regard him as a person of extremely narrow capacity, and as retaining no appearance of the sense for which he was remarkable in childhood. Despairing, therefore, of reaping any profit from his services, or of ever making him a merchant, he sent him back to his father, and the latter had the sense and penetration to believe that, though Giovanni had failed in the pursuits of trade, he might still make a scholar and a good lawyer. To this opinion, however, he does not appear to have come till after he had made a still farther trial of his son's disposition, as he again sent him to different parts of Italy, with the view of increasing his knowledge of commerce.

Unfortunately the study of the law, to which he was at length devoted, was scarcely more agreeable to his mind than the keeping of accounts. For some time he laboured with proper diligence to acquire an acquaintance with the writers whose profound volumes it was requisite he should peruse, but

as often as he opened the Decretals, he was sure to be enticed from their examination by some classic poet, or orator, and his father being now greatly irritated, they had repeated altercations, the latter never ceasing to prophesy that his love of poetry would without doubt speedily reduce him to poverty.

There is some obscurity in the accounts of this part of his life, but it seems that the elder Boccaccio, finding that he made as little progress in the study of law, as he had done towards gaining riches by commerce, forced him to return to the latter pursuit, and that he in consequence visited Naples, where he was ordered to fix his residence.

But nothing could have been worse planned. Every spot in the neighbourhood of that city was peopled with classic forms, and breathed the air of romance and poetry. Nor was the character of its society better calculated to expel from Giovanni's heart the love of study. King Robert, whom we have seen as the friend of Petrarch, had given an impulse to literature in his capital which rendered it the favourite seat of learning and philosophy. Men of talent hastened thither either with the hope of obtaining his patronage, or with the expectation of finding there other scholars of eminence.

They were seldom disappointed, and Naples could consequently boast of being the residence or resort of many distinguished men of the age. Among the most conspicuous were Giovanni Barrili, a man of considerable wealth as well as learning, and Paolo Perugino, the King's librarian; with these and other celebrated persons, Boccaccio was particularly acquainted, and excited both by their reputation and example, he lost every other care in the wish of becoming a man of letters.

His application was equal to his ambition, and his advancement in learning was conspicuous to all who knew him. He studied the highest branches of philosophy, penetrated into the mysteries of astrology, then a favourite and legitimate pursuit with learned men, and commenced the reading of the great fathers of theology. While he was thus ardently pursuing the road of fame, Petrarch arrived in Naples, and the splendour with which he was received, the applauses which followed his examination by King Robert, the noble oration he delivered in praise of poetry, and the glory of his subsequent coronation, had full force on Boccaccio's imagination, already fired with the desire of distinction. At the tomb of Virgil he had deplored his hard doom, declared himself his disciple, and re-

solved to cultivate poetry whatever should be the consequence. But Petrarch was now to be the great object of his imitation, he regarded him thenceforth as his master, and his strongest wish was to be able to follow his steps.

But in the same year that Petrarch visited Naples the mind of Boccaccio became occupied with a less honourable passion. He had hitherto mixed as freely with the gay and even licentious portion of Neapolitan society as with its philosophers. His graceful person, open countenance, and an eloquent flow of conversation rendered his company acceptable wherever he went; and there is reason to believe that he was not always proof to the temptations to which so free an intercourse with society exposed him. His heart, however, remained unaffected by love or any deeper sentiment than admiration till the present period; when being at church, on the evening preceding the commencement of Lent, his eyes were attracted by the beauty of the young Princess Mary, a natural daughter of King Robert. It was the first time he had seen her, but the exquisite perfection of her form and countenance made an indelible impression on his mind, and he willingly resigned himself to the fascination. Like the mistress,

of Petrarch, the object of Boccaccio's passion had been for some time married, and was the wife of a Neapolitan gentleman of rank. But neither this circumstance nor her station placed her at an insuperable distance from the vows of the poet, and few stronger proofs could be given of the depravity of the times, of the almost total disorganization which had taken place in society, than our knowledge of the fact that she received and yielded to his addresses. Their interviews were celebrated by Boccaccio in various parts of his works. "But," as has been excellently observed, "we read the accounts which our author has given of his passion with little interest. His connexion with the Princess was prompted by vanity, and was not one of those passions which affects the whole course of life, and interests us in the recital of its effects in the same proportion as it influenced those whom it possessed. Dante and Petrarch loved not the daughters of kings, but the history of their lives as well as their works is full of Beatrice and Laura. These are the true queens, and Mary, disguised under the name of Fiametta, has the common look and air of a loose woman."* It may be easily understood after this observation,

* Ginguene.

which is as critically as it is morally just, that the poems Boccaccio addressed to his mistress are inferior to those in which Petrarch and Dante celebrate the virtue and unspotted loveliness of theirs. But it was in obedience to her instigation that he composed the romance of Fiametta, that of Filocopo, and his celebrated poem, the Theseid. The style of these works partakes of the merits for which his later productions are conspicuous; and if we consider him only in the character of a light and elegant writer, without pretending either to depth or morality of sentiment, he had already done much towards obtaining perfection in his art. The Filocopo, however, is considered to be very unskilfully constructed; visions and apparitions of every kind pass before the reader, and magic and the instruments of its dark powers are employed to account for the scenes with which he is amused. The conclusion, also, is weak and imperfect, and the work is throughout faulty as a whole; but there are particular passages in it which redeem it from the sweeping condemnation which it would otherwise suffer, those, namely, in which the author began to exercise his almost unequalled talent in describing the passing affections of the mind with a few strokes of his pen, taking instantaneous copies, as it were,

of the thoughts and impressions which grief or joy throws like shadows upon the heart.

But while he was in the full enjoyment of the gaiety of Naples and had made some advances towards literary reputation, he was suddenly interrupted in his pleasures by a letter from his father, now in the decline of life, and left without child or relative to comfort him. Giovanni obeyed the summons which the letter contained, and returned to Florence, but with a mind wholly occupied with the objects he had left behind. Nor was his regret likely to be diminished by the state of society in his paternal city. The most violent disturbances prevailed there, and to the evils produced by faction were added the more insufferable ones of tyranny; Gaultier de Brienne, protected by Austria, having shortly before assumed to himself the uncontrolled direction of affairs. The violent termination put to his career, and which Boccaccio has described,* did not lessen the miseries which harassed the ill-fated territory. He was no sooner expelled than the people and the nobles turned their arms against each other, when the former succeeded in their opposition and obtained the decided superiority for which they had contended.

* De Casibus Virorum.

But, as is so generally the case with States long disturbed by civil commotions, tranquillity was still at a distance, though the Government was apparently established in a single power. Boccaccio, unlike his great predecessor and countryman, was unmoved by the political tempests which agitated the Republic, except as they occasionally disturbed his repose and made him pause in the prosecution of his studies. Nothing, however, could have been more adverse to his taste than the society of citizens, incessantly engaged in virulent discussion, and who could feel no interest in any subject not connected with the interests of their party. The poet, already softened, we may perhaps add enervated, by the refinements of Neapolitan society, shrank from the rude jars to which he was necessarily exposed among such men. His genius was not of that noble and hardy nature in which patriotism rejoices to sow her most precious seeds. While all around him were struggling either for power or liberty, with energies only felt at such times, he was only impatient at being interrupted in his compositions, or was languidly sighing after the Princess.

The passion with which he had inspired that lady was not inferior in warmth to his own. She

is represented as suffering during his absence the most violent sorrow, and as having been narrowly saved from destroying herself by the caution of one of her attendants. Boccaccio was not ignorant of her attachment and ardent wishes for his return, and it was only by the composition of the romance of "Ameto" that he could console himself for the privations he suffered in the house of his father.

Not long, however, after the production of this work, he had the gratification to find himself freed from the trammels he had borne so unwillingly. His father married, and by that step delivered him from the necessity of remaining to attend upon his wants. This being the case, he lost no time in hastening back to Naples; but during the two years he was absent in Florence important changes had taken place, and thrown the kingdom into as great a state of confusion as his own city. On the death of Robert, his daughter Giovanna had ascended the throne; but the regency appointed during her minority was of the most unpopular and vicious character, and the events of this period were mixed up with crimes of the deepest die. But they seem to have had little effect on the pursuits of Boccaccio. He found the Princess as devotedly attached to him as formerly,

and more supreme than ever in the courtly circles of the city. In addition to the advantages he gained from the smiles of a person so popular, he possessed the favour of Acciajuoli, then enjoying considerable power in Naples; and it was not long before he became a favourite of the Queen herself, a woman whose habits were little honourable to the rank she held, but who, amid the commission of grievous errors, professed to imitate her father in his love of literature, and was accustomed to encourage the appearance of learned men at court. In subsequent years she is said to have shown greater consistency, and to have manifested a character in which nature had planted many virtues which the circumstances only of her early reign had stinted of their growth. Boccaccio himself expressed this opinion in after-life, and was followed by others. If the assertion of these writers be correct, the change produced in the mind of Giovanna must indeed have been great, as it is asserted on credible authority, that the freest and most licentious passages in some of our author's works were written in conformity with her taste and even command.*

On the occasion of the Princess Mary's retiring

* Baldelli, Cod. San. ep. 4.

to Baia, to spend the sultry months of the summer, Boccaccio represented himself as suffering the most cruel pangs of jealousy; and in a sonnet he addressed to her at the time, it is not a little amusing to find him expressing his apprehensions lest the corruption of manners which prevailed there should hurt the purity of her chaste mind:

Perir possa il tuo nome, Baia, e il loco;
In te riversin fumo, solfo, e fuoco,
Che hai corrotto la più casta mente
Che fosse in donna colla tua licenza.

But not content with this apostrophe to Baia, he composed the poem of Filostrato, in ottava rima, and transmitted it to the Princess, with a long letter, in which he expresses himself in the same style which a young and ardent lover would employ in addressing an object of the most pure and delicate affection. This poem was followed by another, to which he gave the title of "L'Amorosa Visione." In this curious production he relates that he was conducted in a dream into the temple of Earthly Felicity by the hand of Celestial Wisdom—that he there saw the Triumph of Learning, the Splendour of Riches, and the Glory of Martial Fame; but there, at the same time, he saw the

most renowned possessors of these things, either miserable or perishing. He was then led, he thought, into the Garden of Love, where, separated from his celestial guide, he wanders about in astonishment at the beautiful objects which everywhere meet his gaze. The versification of the Amorosa Visione is generally considered more musical than that of the author's previous works: but the meaning of the fable is in many parts obscure, and it is only here and there, and in the descriptive stanzas, that a reader of the present day would find any thing to admire.

While he was residing at Naples the plague broke out at Florence, the ravages of which he has described with such wonderful power in the introduction to the Decameron. This disastrous event took place in the year 1348; and, from some passages in the description just mentioned, it has been supposed that he was a personal spectator of the sufferings and disorder which prevailed.* But this is disputed, as no mention is made of his being at Florence in the accounts of his life, till about three years after, and his return to Naples was in 1344. It is the more commonly received opinion, therefore, that he drew his pic-

* Manni.

tures chiefly from his own imagination, always sufficiently inventive for such purposes, while that which he wanted of reality, was, unfortunately, too abundantly supplied him, the pestilence having spread itself over almost the whole of Italy, and the principal part of Europe.

From the alarm which universally prevailed, Boccaccio could find no relief so efficacious as literary exertion; and, as it was impossible, perhaps, for his mind to escape altogether from the horrors which surrounded him, he made them subservient to his fancy; and, on the darkest and most terrific foreground which ever painter employed, he drew an infinite variety of the gayest and most graceful forms—of landscapes the most charming, and incidents the most amusing that the human fancy could create. It would have been fortunate if our mention of the Decameron might be limited to this remark; but, to the regret of every lover of elegant literature, and to the loss of Boccaccio, who has missed thereby the smiles and praises of many eyes and hearts, to which he might have ministered gladness—this celebrated work is replete with the grossest of licentious thought, and sometimes leaves a feeling of disgust in the mind, from which it must get free before it can derive any pleasure

from the purer and exquisitely-written passages which follow. All that has been said by the defenders of Boccaccio against the reproofs with which critics of the soundest judgment have visited him, amount to nothing more than that an author is justified, if the manners of his age be licentious, in writing licentiously. There is only one case in which the manners of the age can prove an excuse for licentiousness in the compositions of contemporary authors, and it is when their intellects are so blinded by the example of their countrymen, that they are unable to see the gross corruption in which they are involved. But this bad excuse cannot be made in favour of Boccaccio. Amid all his gallantries he retained the clearest apprehension of what was morally good or evil. No mind that has lost this delicacy of moral vision can call into being the fair and gentle images which waited obedient on his pen. It was, therefore, only to pamper the corrupt taste of Naples and Florence that he marred his Decameron; and this was done with his eyes open to the evils which that corruption was on all sides producing—sending a scorpion into the bosom of every family, and threatening the already tottering fabric of civil society with utter and irremediable ruin. Boccaccio

was, it is true, neither a philosopher nor a moralist, at the time when he wrote this far-famed work; but he was a man of clear good sense as well as imagination, and he was the citizen of a state suffering under the most appalling calamities, in both which characters he sinned as deeply as author ever did against the laws of humanity. It is fortunate for our esteem for him as a man, though it can avail nothing for the work itself, that he was himself, in subsequent years, one of the severest censurers of his Decameron.

While he was employed in the composition of this work, Naples was thrown into alarm by the invasion of the King of Hungary, who entered the territory of Giovanna with a numerous army. The situation of the Government prevented her from attempting to defend herself, and she fled into Provence: but the conduct of Acciajuoli, who remained firm to her cause, enabled her shortly to return. Boccaccio was deeply grieved at the misfortunes of Giovanna, and has alluded to them in his "Eclogues," and other parts of his works: but he was soon after called to the consideration of events in which he was more nearly concerned.

The death of his father, which occurred in the year 1350, left him the sole protector of his bro-

ther, then between five and six years old, the fruit of his father's marriage with Bice dei Bosticchi, who was also dead. It had been the particular desire of old Boccaccio, that Giovanni should return to Florence, and take upon himself the charge of his little brother's education. This request was attended to with filial piety, and the same year saw our poet once more in his paternal city. To his great gratification Petrarch passed through Florence about the same time, in his way to Rome, on occasion of the Jubilee; and having now acquired some degree of fame to authorize the acquaintance, he commenced that intimacy with his great master, which continued, as we have seen, uninterrupted till the latter's death.

Soon after this meeting with Petrarch, the mind of Boccaccio seems to have undergone a considerable change. It is not improbable that the counsels of his friend, who is known to have warned him against the vain pursuits of his former years, was one of the main causes of this reform. The death of his father, and the responsibility with which he found himself invested, was, no doubt, another; and to these we may add the important circumstance that his years had been multiplying during his sojourn at Naples, and he had hitherto

produced no work which could place him in an equal rank with the learned men whose example had fired his ambition. His master, Petrarch, professed to regard with contempt the poetry he himself wrote in the vulgar language, and depended for future, as well as present celebrity, on the extent of his erudition, and the profound treatises he had composed in Latin.

Moved by all these considerations, Boccaccio began to regard the affairs of the Republic with a different feeling, and appears to have formed some intention of taking a part with his fellow-citizens in the conduct of the State. At first, however, he shrank from the toil and hazard in which, he feared, such an undertaking would involve him; but at length his dislike of politics vanished before the growing energy of his mind, and he panted, he said, to see his country more powerful than ever, extending the boundaries of its territory, and correcting, by laws emanating from the people, the vices of the great, and the pride of neighbouring states. But this patriotic wish was, as yet, far from being realized. The worst disorders still prevailed, and every class of the people was the prey of some destructive vice. The luxury of the great wasted the resources which were required for the

necessaries of the Republic, and the lower orders, oppressed by taxes they were unable to pay, freed themselves to the commission of crime. The licentiousness which the plague nursed into maturity, continued after the terror it had inspired was removed, and no city in Europe presented, at this time, a more unsettled and gloomy aspect than Florence.

But there were many reasons why Boccaccio, now permanently settled in the city, should share in its concerns. His father had been greatly esteemed by the chief persons of the State, and had enjoyed the honourable dignity of prior; he was himself known to be eminently qualified for assisting in their counsels, both by learning and talent, and was arrived at that period of life when the mind enjoys the advantages rendered by experience without being weakened by the infirmities of age. Having thus become a public man, he was sent on a mission to Padua the year following his return from Naples; the object of his journey being to invite Petrarch to accept the presidentship of the University, as mentioned in the life of that author. There is little doubt that it was principally owing to the influence of Boccaccio that this honour was paid his illustrious friend, who received

him, on the occasion with marks of the warmest attachment. From this period, indeed, their acquaintance is said to have become much stricter than it was before, their letters being more frequent, and each professing to have no secret which he wished to conceal from the other.*

Besides this mission, as grateful to his private feelings, as it was honourable to him in his public station, he was sent on several others; but there is great confusion in the chronological order of these journeys, and some of them bear an earlier date than that assigned for his second return to Florence, which, if correct, would account for the opinion of some of his biographers that he was there during the plague. It is, however, tolerably clear that his next public mission, after that to Padua, was undertaken for the purpose of inducing the Marquis of Brandeburg to send a force against the Visconti, then too powerful for the independence of their neighbours; and that after this, in April 1353, he formed part of an embassy to Innocent VI. at Avignon.

The same year also was rendered an epoch in his life by the publication of the Decameron, which, it is supposed, was only partly written at

* Tiraboschi.

Naples, and not completed till the present time. The sensation it excited was proportionable to its singular merits; it was rapidly circulated, and, though severely criticised, was almost immediately received as the purest specimen of Tuscan prose that had ever appeared.

But, great as was the reputation he acquired by this popular style of composition, he never lost sight of the higher pursuits of literature. It was the common and wise opinion of the learned men of that period, that if a good taste for letters could be ever created, it must be by a general circulation and study of classical models. In the age of Petrarch and Boccaccio, this was particularly the case, and had the system been only so far pursued as was necessary to this purpose, it would have produced all the advantages expected, without becoming that check to the developement of native talent which it afterwards proved.

Besides being a careful student himself, Boccaccio exerted his mind in aiding the studies of others, and, like his friend and pattern Petrarch, employed much of his time and money in searching for, and purchasing manuscripts. Both of them being travellers, they were eminently successful in this pursuit, and there were few of the great men

of that age, or the one subsequent to it, whom their example did not in a great measure encourage to the same laudable exertions. In a journey he made to Monte Cassino, he discovered the miserable fate which attended some of the most valuable collections of manuscripts that had escaped the ravages of the barbarians. The monastery of Monte Cassino was an establishment of considerable repute, and the object of Boccaccio in visiting it was to examine its stores of ancient literature; but what were his sorrow and astonishment, on inquiring for the library, to find himself conducted, by means of a ladder, into a loft, to which there was neither a door, nor any other kind of protection against the weather, the windows being choaked up with rank grass, and the books moth-eaten and covered with mould. This was a sight sufficiently horrible for a learned man, or, it might have been thought, for any rational being; but a still worse circumstance remained for him to learn. On inquiring what opinion the good fathers had formed respecting the value and use of this ill-protected treasure, he was informed, that whenever they were in want of money, they took some of the manuscripts, and having contrived to obliterate the writing, replaced

the classic, by copying on the parchment some part of the ritual, which they then sold to the first purchaser they could find among the women or children of the neighbourhood. If Boccaccio had required any fresh excitement to diligence in his search, this would have amply served the purpose, and had it not been for the industry and genuine admiration of learning which inspired such men, we should at present have scarcely possessed a single specimen of ancient genius.

A considerable period had now elapsed since he had had an opportunity of enjoying the society of his revered Petrarch. Their interviews at Florence and Padua were far too brief to satisfy Boccaccio, who earnestly desired to open his mind and heart more freely to his friend than could be done by letters. Resolving, therefore, to delay no longer, he set out, in the year 1359, for Milan, where he remained several days with Petrarch, conversing to his great profit, as he informs us in one of his letters, on various topics of religion and morality, his friend not ceasing to persuade him against pursuing those vain pleasures in which he had spent his youth, and so large a portion of his manhood. These persuasions, coming from a man so highly respected as Petrarch, were never heard without

awakening feelings of penitence, accompanied with resolutions of amendment; but in the year 1362, a singular circumstance occurred which made a deeper and more lasting impression on Boccaccio's heart, than any of the poet's exhortations. One day, while in his own house at Florence, a stranger requested to speak with him in secret. On his obeying the summons, he found the person to be a monk, whom he had never before seen, from the Carthusian monastery at Sienna. He inquired the purport of his visit, and the monk answered that he had brought a message from Father Petroni, of the same monastery as himself, who on his death-bed had desired him to tell Boccaccio that though he had never seen him with his bodily eyes, he knew him in the spirit, and that he desired him to repent speedily, and alter both the style of his writings and his manner of living, or he would shortly die and incur eternal condemnation. He further added, that Petroni had been endowed with the power of prophecy, had seen Jesus Christ, and read in his divine countenance a revelation of all the events which appertained either to the past, present, or future; and to prove that he was truly commissioned to be the bearer of this mysterious message, he told Boccaccio of a circumstance

in his life which the poet thought was unknown to every one but himself.

The impression which this event made on his mind was proportionable to the mystery with which it was attended. Nor is it so strange that a man of his learning should be thus affected by superstition, as we are ready at first to imagine. The age itself was superstitious, and though the study of philosophy had confined the grosser kind of credulity to the vulgar, it was not every species of learning cultivated at the time, which tended to clear and strengthen the reason. It seems as if mankind feared truth and knowledge as they do the elements of fire and water, which, in common parlance, are good servants but bad masters; for in every age we see them suffered to break forth only partially, and that they are almost always mingled immediately with the leaven of either prepared or spontaneous falsehood. At the period of which we are speaking, this mixture of truth with error was more the consequence of weakness than design, and thus we find those even who were most eager and conscientiously laborious in the pursuit of genuine knowledge, employing their minds on the fallacies of alchemy and astrology. Boccaccio himself studied the latter science while at Naples,

and besides others, he had the prudent and learned King Robert as an authority for the utility of the pursuit. Being the willing recipient then of doctrines established on such airy foundations as those of astrology, it required no great effort of his imagination to make him the attentive auditor of the Carthusian monk. If we add, moreover, to this reason, another furnished by the character of his life—sensualists very frequently becoming superstitious as they advance in years—we shall not wonder so greatly at seeing the author of the Decameron, gay, learned, and philosophical as he was, subject to fears which minds infinitely inferior to his would have rejected without an effort.

But so great was the effect of the warning upon his feelings, that, from the time he received it, he resolved to resign all his former pursuits—to give up the composition of poetry—to sell his library, which consisted chiefly of profane authors, and to lead a life of penitence, abstinence, and meditation. Full of these intentions, he wrote to Petrarch, acquainting him with his conversion, and expecting to receive his unqualified approbation of the course he was about to pursue. But that virtuous and devout man had been too long exercised in religious inquiries; had too well studied the move-

ments of the human heart in all the circumstances in which it could be placed, either by error or penitence, and was too solidly learned to be deceived by the most admired of abstruse sciences. Boccaccio's letter, therefore, was far from giving him satisfaction. He saw his friend in danger of becoming a mere enthusiast, unqualified for nourishing the real truths of religion in his heart, and equally unfitted for performing the duties which are to demonstrate their purity. The answer he sent is an admirable specimen of the vigour of thought which he possessed in so eminent a degree, and serves to illustrate the respective characters, mental as well as personal, of these two great men. "To see Jesus Christ," says he, "with the eyes of the body is, I confess, a thing altogether wonderful, if it be true: but men, in all ages, have been known to veil the grossest impostures under some pretence of religion, covering with their low inventions and pretensions to authority, the human fraud which lies at the bottom. That such has been the case in the present instance I have not the least doubt. When the messenger of the father shall come to me, after having completed his other missions, I shall be able to decide what degree of faith is due to his assertions.

The age of the man, his countenance, his eyes, his manners, his attitude, his movements, his walk and manner of sitting, his discourse, and, above all, the conclusion and intention of the orator, will serve to enlighten me on the subject." Besides desiring Boccaccio to proceed in this rational manner with regard to the messenger himself, he instructs him how he ought to receive the warnings to repentance, and assures him that there is no necessity for selling his books or forsaking his studies, but that he should convert his occupations to a good use, as the fathers and learned men of the Church had done. This advice had, in a great measure, the effect intended, as Boccaccio is known to have continued his literary pursuits, and with a disposition altogether free from the taint of licentiousness which appeared in his former productions. But it is said, that he assumed the ecclesiastical habit immediately after his conversion, and applied himself to the study of theology with diligence, though with little success.*

The advances he had been making for some time past in Greek literature were of the utmost importance, not only to himself, but to Florence. He studied while at Naples, about the year 1340, under

* Mazzuchelli.

the Monk Barlaam, and since the year 1360 he had enjoyed the advantages of Leontio Pilato's* constant instructions, and had procured the establishment of a Greek Professorship in the city, by which the language and literature were laid open to the acquisition of all who had sufficient leisure for the study. The zeal he manifested in rendering the pursuit as general and practicable as possible, led him into expenses which he was ill able to bear. He lodged the Professor in his own house during the whole time of his residence in Florence, and suffered continual torment from the rude habits and violent passions of his guest. Besides thus sacrificing his time and comfort, he laboured incessantly in searching for Greek manuscripts, the want of which proved the greatest hindrance to the general cultivation of the language. Wherever these precious remains of antiquity were to be met with, even in Greece itself, some agent of Boccaccio was sure to be at work, and scarcely any price was refused, if the manuscript was at all worthy of attention. By these means, his collection soon became considerable, and, for more than a century, almost all the Greek manuscripts to be found in Tuscany owed their appearance there to

* Filippo Villani.

his exertions and liberality.* As a farther method of making known the productions so justly venerated, he employed Leontio on a Latin translation of the Iliad and Odyssey, of which the former was completed, and the latter nearly so.

These labours of Boccaccio will ever render his name venerable in the history of learning. To him, with a very few other scholars of the age, Europe was indebted for the light that broke forth from the purest sources of poetry and eloquence: and, though he shared this glory with some of his great contemporaries, by far the larger portion is due to himself, since it was he who first created opportunities for the general study of Greek—who collected the means and materials for the pursuit, and who, by the ceaseless exertion of many years of his life, and the expenditure of his income, at length succeeded in raising a permanent abode in the West for the hitherto abandoned muse of Attica.

But, unfortunately for Boccaccio, he was not wealthy, certainly not sufficiently so for the liberality which formed a striking feature of his character. The expenses in which he involved himself, sometimes in the exercise of his public functions, at others by his patronage of literature, were much

* Manetti.

greater than his income would bear. His fortune was thus gradually reduced, and he found himself, in the decline of life, with means scarcely sufficient for his support, and deserted by all his friends but Petrarch. The noble conduct of that affectionate and high-minded man in this instance gives additional lustre to his fame. His letters to Boccaccio on the subject of his misfortunes breathe the tenderest regard, and his offers of assistance are made in a spirit, of which it is difficult to say whether its warmth or delicacy be the more worthy of admiration. Besides offering him the use of both his purse and interest, he invited him to share his home; and in the letter which contains the answer to Boccaccio's account of the Monk's visit, he reproves him for not accepting this invitation. "I praise you," says he, "for having refused the grand offers made you of riches, and for preferring liberty of mind and a tranquil poverty; but I cannot give you the same praise for refusing the repeated invitations of a friend. I am not in a situation to enrich you; if I were, it should not be by my words, or by my pen, but by things and actions that you should judge of me. I am, however, living so, that what suffices for one, will suffice abundantly for two,

who can have the same inclinations as well as the same house."

Boccaccio, however, with the jealousy of a man whose most valued possession was his perfect personal liberty, refused to accept this offer, as he did also many others of his friend to obtain him some lucrative office. Petrarch could not be offended at this, for he had himself acted almost in the same manner, and rejected rank and fortune to move and speak as his own inclination might direct him. We cannot sufficiently admire this trait of character, so conspicuous in these great men, and which, from Dante downwards, was the characteristic of Italy's worthiest sons. There is no passage in their noblest works which so affects the mind with delight as their examples of independence. They were admired and courted by princes; they were the frequent residents of palaces; were tempted to become courtiers, not merely by offers of wealth or advancement, but by personal flatteries; and they might, if they had chosen, been conspicuous in the councils as well as courts of kings: but nothing could tempt them from their independence. We see them passing on from court to court, conversing with their princely hosts as if they had been prophets sent with les-

sons of wisdom, and then taking their farewell unchanged in their manners, and with the same free look and spirit as they bore when they arrived.

But though Boccaccio declined the proposition of his friend as to making his house a permanent residence, he was too attached to him not to avail himself of every opportunity of enjoying his society. During the year 1363 he received an invitation from Acciajuoli, now Grand Seneschal of the kingdom of Naples,* and which he accepted; but the style of his reception on this occasion was so little in accordance with the respect due to him, that he abridged his stay and proceeded by a circuitous route to Venice, where Petrarch was then residing. The three months they remained together were spent in so pleasant and profitable a manner, that they retained the remembrance of them as forming one of the happiest periods of their lives.

On returning to Florence, Boccaccio found it less calculated than ever for the residence of one who, wearied by exertion and disgusted with the pleasures of the world, was anxiously desirous of composing his mind to sober reflection. Leaving, therefore, the city in which war and the plague

* Filippo Villani.

had again made their appearance, he retreated to the vale of Elsa, and in the little town of Certaldo, dear to him as the birth-place of his family, took up his residence in a cottage, where he enjoyed without interruption the twofold pleasure of quiet and study. His days, however, were not spent in mere repose or amusement. The chief of his Latin works were composed or planned during the period he passed at Certaldo, and he was only prevailed upon to leave his rural retreat at the instance of the Republic, the chief men of which desired him to undertake an embassy to Urban V. of whose resentment they had reason to be apprehensive. The celebrity which now attended the name of Boccaccio, and his manner of performing similar trusts in previous years, pointed him out as the most fitting person for the undertaking, and he was prevailed upon to set out for the pontifical court at Avignon.

The reception he met with from the chief men in attendance on Urban, was highly flattering to his feelings. Philip of Cabassoles, the ancient and affectionate friend of Petrarch, embraced him in the presence of the Pope and the Cardinals, observing, at the same time, that he seemed to see in him his beloved Petrarch. In returning from

Avignon he is said to have visited Genoa,* but some of his biographers assign as late a date as 1367 for his journey to that city, when he was again sent to Urban, who had then removed with his court to Rome.† This was the last time he appeared in the character of ambassador, and the honour he received from the Pontiff formed a fitting close to his missions, Urban observing, in his address to the senate, that he was as gratified at seeing Boccaccio on account of his own virtues, as he was to see him as the ambassador of Florence. The mention of this circumstance is important, as it shows the change which had taken place in the character of Boccaccio since 1361, and that he had not forgotten the conduct necessary to a churchman. So much respect, indeed, had he acquired in that capacity, that he was characterized by the Bishop of Florence as a man in whose circumspection, providence, and purity of faith he had the most perfect confidence.‡

In the year 1368 he again visited Venice, expecting to find Petrarch there, but the latter had set out some time before for Pavia; after staying, therefore, only long enough to refresh himself from the fatigues of his journey, he bade adieu to the

* Tiraboschi. † Mazzuchelli. ‡ Manni.

daughter and son-in-law of his friend, who had received and entertained him with the respect and affection of children. His principal reason for seeking communication with Petrarch on this occasion, appears to have been the increasing anxiety he experienced respecting religion; having missed seeing him, therefore, he was glad to avail himself of the invitation of Niccolo di Montefalcone to visit the monastery of St. Stephen, in Calabria, of which he was abbot. The journey to St. Stephen's was a long and difficult one, but neither fatigue nor danger could deter him from his pious resolution, and thither, accordingly, he proceeded. Great was his disappointment, on arriving there, to find himself treated with as much coolness and neglect as had marked his reception by the Grand Seneschal of Naples. The Abbot, though he had been his school-fellow, and had himself invited him to the monastery, kept out of the way on his arrival, and on every occasion, when it was possible, took care to avoid him. The only fruit, therefore, he reaped from his long and painful journey was a lesson of patience, but a report was speedily circulated through Naples that he had taken the vows of a Carthusian.

No better fate attended him on his return to

Florence. He found the city as usual in a state of violent disturbance, and either from this circumstance, or, as it is thought, from some personal injury or affront, he was induced to turn from its gates and pursue his way back to Naples. As it was not on Acciajuoli's proud and capricious humour that he this time depended for hospitable treatment, he found some compensation for his former troubles in the honourable treatment he received from many of the most distinguished personages of the place; among these were Mainardo di Cavalcanti and Ugo di S. Severino, while the Queen Giovanna added her influence to theirs to persuade him to take up his permanent residence in her capital. But the world had not only lost its charms for him, it had become a wearisome and uncomfortable abode; and resisting all the persuasions of his friends, he hastened back to his retired cottage at Certaldo, Florence being still too troubled for his residence.

He had not, however, been long returned when he was attacked with a scrofulous disease which rendered his life a burthen to him. A weakness of the intestines, and other signs of a decaying frame, accompanied this disorder; his countenance wore the paleness of death, his hand trembled, his

memory seemed wholly lost; and writing or reading, his sole but sufficient solace in all former seasons of distress, he almost shunned with a feeling of disgust. His whole thoughts were occupied with meditating on death, "and the chamber," says Baldelli, "which used to ring with the harmonious songs of the Muses, was silent as the grave." The disorder at length reached its crisis: a violent fever raged through his whole body, his limbs seemed consuming with a living fire, and he conceived himself on the eve of entering into eternal judgment; but the disease suddenly took a favourable turn and he recovered.

Florence had, with few exceptions, continued to treat Boccaccio, from his first return on the death of his father to the present time, with the highest respect. The esteem of his fellow-citizens was shown in the several appointments he received as ambassador on the most important occasions, in their instituting a Greek professorship at his request, and in their invitation of Petrarch and restoration of his confiscated patrimony. But a still greater mark of their regard for Boccaccio was evinced shortly after his recovery. It had been his long and anxious desire to see fitting honours paid to the memory of the much injured Dante. Urged

by his ceaseless exhortations and reproofs; as well as by a growing feeling of shame at the recollection of the poet's exile, the Florentines at length determined to do whatever lay in their power to remove the reproach. Having, therefore, reversed the decree which had confiscated his goods, they next resolved upon instituting a professorship for the better explication of the "Divina Commedia;" for illustrating the philosophical mysteries, and the varied and abstruse learning in which it abounded. To fill the new chair no man in Europe was so well qualified as Boccaccio. Besides being an enthusiastic admirer of Dante, and having studied him as only men fired with emulation can study an author, he was next to him the most perfect master of the vulgar language; as a respected citizen of the state which decreed to his author a life of exile and poverty, and had furnished the objects of his bitterest satire, he could enter into the meaning of allusions which a person less honoured in his public capacity as well as for his literary eminence neither could nor dare do; add to which he was learned in all the prevailing sciences of the age; was an historian and philosopher, and, to a certain degree, was versed in the divinity of the fathers and the schools; while his present sacred

character as a churchman, added to the reputation he enjoyed for learning and genius, would secure attention to his lectures as a species of religious as well as literary instruction.

These considerations had their due weight with the Florentine magistrates, and Boccaccio was invited to fill the honourable post of public commentator on the Commedia. His lectures commenced, as has been related, in October 1373, and were continued till his death. The sickness from which he had so lately recovered, had made fearful ravages on his constitution, and his powers of application were greatly diminished; he was thus often interrupted in his lectures, but he resumed them the instant the brief restoration of strength allowed of any exertion, and his commentary, as far as it is continued, is regarded as an honourable monument of critical skill, erudition, and poetic taste.* The approbation with which his discourses were received, and the income of a hundred florins attached to the professorship, added considerably to his comfort; but the death of Petrarch, which happened about ten months after he undertook the office, affected him with so deep a sorrow, that it was regarded as another warning to prepare

* Baldelli.

for his own departure. The information of the melancholy event first reached him by public report, but Francesco Brossano, Petrarch's son-in-law, shortly after acquainted him with all the circumstances attending the loss of their common friend, and to the letter containing this account, Boccaccio sent an answer, in which his own grief, and the desire of moderating that of others, are equally apparent. "My first feeling," says he, "on receiving your letter, was to come and mingle my tears with yours; to join with you in prayer to Heaven, and breathe my last adieu to our dear father at his tomb." Then mentioning his infirm state of health as the only cause which could have prevented him from proceeding to Arquà, he continues—"But I have said enough respecting myself; the reading of your letter has renewed my grief, and I have done nothing but weep the whole night. My sorrow is not on account of that excellent man himself, for his probity, his manners, his fastings and vigils, his prayers and numberless virtues, all assure us that he is gone to God, and is enjoying everlasting glory. It is for myself and the friends whom he has left in this troubled world, where we are like a vessel in the midst of a stormy ocean, and driving upon rocks—it is for ourselves I weep.

But while I resign myself to the distress which preys upon my own heart, I cannot help thinking how much deeper must be yours and the excellent Tullia's, my dear sister and your wife. As a Florentine, I envy Arquà the honour it enjoys in possessing the remains of him whose noble soul was the sojourn of the Muses, the sanctuary of philosophy, the temple of all the arts, and above all of that Ciceronian eloquence of which so many examples are to be found in his writings; and this honour Arquà enjoys not from any claims of its own, but from the humility of him for whom we weep. Arquà, hitherto unknown not only to foreigners, but even to the inhabitants of Padua, shall henceforth be known to all nations, and its name be famous throughout the world. It will be venerated as we venerate the hills of Pausilippo, because they contain the bones of Virgil; they will meet with the same regard as that which attaches to the shores of the Euxine for the sake of Ovid; and to Smyrna because of Homer. I doubt not that the merchant returning loaded with wealth from the farthest shores of the ocean, will look with respect and delight, as he sails along the Adriatic, on the Euganean hills, and say to himself, or his companions, yonder are the mountains which

inclose within their bosom the wonder of the world; him who was the asylum of the sciences, Petrarch, that eloquent poet, who was long since crowned in the queen of cities, and who has left in his writings the promises of immortal renown. Unfortunate country! that you should have been denied the glory of possessing the ashes of thy illustrious son! But you were unworthy of that honour: you neglected to bring him home to you while he was living, and to place him, while you might, in your bosom. You would have invited him back had he been a fabricator of crimes and disorders—if he had been guilty of avarice, ingratitude, and envy."

The condition to which he now found himself reduced was distressing in the extreme. So long as Petrarch lived, he had a friend to whom he could confide his most secret thoughts, and who was always ready to sooth his complaints, and afford him the instruction he desired. By his death, the last tie was broken which bound him to the world, and he thenceforth expected his end as having nothing farther which could worthily occupy his thoughts. So feeble also was he become, that it took him three days to write a letter, his bodily infirmities thus combining with the depression of

his mind to prevent his solacing himself with his former studies. But the warmth of his friendship, and regard for the memory of one from whose genius he had reaped so many advantages, enabled him to resist for awhile even the decay of nature. Francesco Brossano having intreated him to undertake the editing of Petrarch's unpublished works, he yielded to the request. The poem of Africa was rendered to the world under his inspection; and it was only owing to his influence, it is said, that several of his friend's manuscripts were saved from the flames, the persons who had been publicly appointed to examine and decide on their fate proving themselves wholly unqualified for the task.

This was the last effort of Boccaccio's mind. Finding his end rapidly approaching, he prepared for it by increased attention to the offices of religion, and by settling the few worldly cares pertaining to his humble fortune. His chief possession was his books and furniture, the former by far the most valuable. These he willed to Father Martin, an Augustin monk, and his confessor, with the stipulation that he should leave them at his death to the convent of which he was a member. Like Petrarch's, however, this caution failed to preserve the precious relics of his industry, all having perished,

and even the cabinet in which the learned Niccolo Niccoli had them placed in the following century. What little property remained to him in money, he left to his two nephews, and having completed these arrangements, and fulfilled the duties necessary to his situation, he expired on the twenty-first of December 1375, regretted by Florence and all civilized Europe.

We need not wait to point the moral of Boccaccio's life, so admirably adapted to illustrate the universal lessons of experience. There were few things wanting to his old age to make it happy; he was venerated by his countrymen, enjoyed the blessings of freedom and leisure, and was crowned with fame and literary honours; but he was a prey to regret; the fruits even of his wisdom, long treasured up with successful care, were stolen from him by a superstitious feeling consequent on former irregularities, and the repose he sought for and obtained was broken by a vain and anxious wish to recall the works which he had sent into the world, and which were doing mischief before his eyes to the objects he now most venerated.

The works of Boccaccio are voluminous. Of his Latin treatises, the most remarkable is the Genealogy of the Gods, "De Genealogia Deorum," in

which he inquires into the origin and mysteries of the Heathen mythology, with a display of all the learning of which he was master. At the time it was written, it was generally regarded as a production little less than divine.* Some critics, however, discovered several errors in it, which they were not slow in making public; and, in the present day, the labours of Faber, Bryant, and other eminent mythologists, in our own and other countries, have thrown so much light on such subjects, that it possesses little interest for the inquirer. But considering the few aids which Boccaccio could procure, and those with the greatest difficulty, he merited much of the praise which he received from his contemporaries, notwithstanding occasional errors, and the want of a more comprehensive theory. His other Latin works are, one, in nine books, intitled "De Casibus virorum et fæminarum illustrium," and another, "De Claris Mulieribus," the latter having been undertaken, it is said, as a recompense to the sex for his former libels on its honour. His Latin poetry consists of sixteen Eclogues, but they are not considered as worthy of his genius, nor has he obtained for his Latin style, either in prose or verse, the slightest

* Tiraboschi.

commendation. It appears, indeed, that he did not begin to compose any regular work in that language till his residence at Certaldo, when he was in the decline of life, and the instances, I believe, are rare, if there be any, of men's obtaining a facility in classical composition who have not been trained to it from very early youth.

Besides the Italian works alluded to in the memoir, we have still to mention the "Ninfale Fiesolano," a poem in *ottava rima*, and partaking both of a romantic and mythological character. The "Ameto," a pastoral, in prose and verse intermixed, and supposed to conceal under its allegorical characters allusions to real personages; the "Laberinto d' Amore, or Corbaccio," a satire directed against some widow of Florence, who at first received and then ridiculed his addresses. There is some wit in different parts of this work, but it is rendered wholly unworthy of the author, by the gross violation of good taste which pervades many of its scenes. The Life of Dante has been already several times alluded to. It is rightly regarded as too much tinctured with romance to be ranked among legitimate biographies; but it is excellently observed by M. Baldelli, that it is a valuable ornament of Italian literature, containing as it does

many true and important facts intermixed with its romance, and forming altogether an eloquent appeal against the ingratitude of Florence towards its most venerable citizen.

But the genius of Boccaccio was less powerful and elevated than was requisite to make him a great poet, though sufficiently vivid and creative to make him the first of novelists. The earliest movements of his ambition prompted him to emulate the fame of Virgil; the Princess Mary, by giving him an occasion for writing, still farther strengthened him in this resolution, and numerous sonnets and the "Theseid" were the speedy produce of his muse. The latter was the first Italian heroic poem—the model of Chaucer's "Palamon and Arcite;" and was the first work written in the ottava rima, of which Boccaccio may be termed the inventor. But early in his career he met with the Italian poetry of Petrarch; and such was his conviction of its insurpassable sweetness, that he threw whatever of his own he could reach into the fire, and determined thenceforth to seek for fame where priority was more attainable. There is, however, sufficient vigour in his first poetical essays to indicate the presence of a power, which, had it been cultivated, would have placed him high in

the ranks of his brother bards. His verses have not the smoothness of Petrarch's, nor does he ever seem to have felt that intense admiration of the morally great—the spiritually good and beautiful—which inspired his master; but they are replete with varied imagery—they breathe the language of passion, such as it is in ordinary minds, with a moving and graceful elegance—the stores moreover of a memory well furnished with classic illustrations, enrich the commonest sentiments they contain; and, in several passages where a gleam of brighter light seems to have burst upon the poet's heart, they rise into dignity, and flow on with a solemn and noble fulness.

But it was the misfortune of Boccaccio, so far as his poetical reputation was concerned, to live in an age when only one writer of great eminence had trusted his fame to the common language; and that writer was altogether opposite to him in both his moral and intellectual character. Had his genius been of the very highest order, this would have been of little consequence, or rather it would have been an advantage to him: but his mind was wanting in that conscious power of originality, which, using the same medium of thought as another and a mightier genius, can yet pass into a distinct region,

inventing and creating new forms or circumstances freely and fearlessly, though subject to the laws which the father of the language and its poetry had laid down. Had Boccaccio been able to look back into the literary history of his country, and see a host of writers, not his superiors in either learning or imagination, crowned with fame for poetry in the native language, he would not only have been encouraged to proceed in the same career, but would, it is probable, have surpassed many of his esteemed successors. But he was neither daring nor original enough to compete with Dante, and his solitary example of very distinguished success was not sufficient to stimulate him to perseverance. Like all minds which, though possessing great powers, fall short of the highest excellence, he sought support from aid foreign to the native soil of his genius—he had not courage to wait till the prophet's cloak should fall on him from heaven, but borrowed one of a prophet with whom he had no relationship. Virgil, and the language of Virgil, were worthy of veneration, and Dante venerated them, but only as one mighty man honours another. Boccaccio followed in the train of hundreds who had been his servile imitators, and would have worn the same chain and

sunk into the same obscurity, but for the Decameron, and his reputation as a patron of learning. Could he have trusted himself without fear to the support of the common idiom, and ventured to leave entirely the cold glittering fables of classic mythology for the old romances of Spain and France, he might have been as well known for a poet as a novelist, and anticipated the period of the Romanesque school. That he possessed many qualifications to encourage him in this pursuit is abundantly evidenced by the rich fancies which appear in the poetry he has left, and by the skill with which he penetrated into the true character of Italian verse, inventing that most admirable of stanzas, the Ottava Rima. Though we cannot, therefore, regard him as approaching, even distantly, the sublime and majestic Dante, or as equalling the tender and spiritual Petrarch, his works indicate sufficient of the poet's calling to render him not unworthy of being the third of the great triumvirate, which renders the fourteenth century so splendid an epoch in the history of literature.

Of Boccaccio's character as a scholar, the preceding narrative will enable us to say with justice, that it was composed of qualities as useful to the

cause of learning itself, as they were productive of fame to their possessor. From the commencement of his career, amid the philosophers of Naples, to his death at Certaldo, he was as industrious in study as he was enthusiastic in the pursuit of fame; and, fortunately for his countrymen, the habits of application which he cultivated were blended with a most versatile and active disposition. Instead of resting quietly in the enjoyment of the treasures he was gradually accumulating, he sought to circulate them, and awaken general attention to the value of his pursuits. He had no sooner settled in Florence, and become a member of the Government, than he became, at the same time, the representative of the great literary republic which was slowly extending itself over Europe. His exertions in this character were, as we have seen, unremitting: the love of pleasure even, to which he was so fatally the slave, yielded to his zeal for learning. The means which might have increased the comforts of his old age were expended in the same cause; and, when every other passion had lost its force, his mind retained its ardour in this respect undiminished. Nor should Boccaccio's devotion to the cause of learning be ascribed to mere individual taste or vanity. The

path of his fame was marked by the Decameron, and prose composition in the vulgar tongue was, in a peculiar manner, the strong-hold of his genius. He was well aware of this, and, though he composed occasionally in Latin, and exerted his erudition as a philosopher and historian, he never seems to have regarded these efforts as the best proofs of his talents. Petrarch also was in this, as in poetry, too celebrated to admit of a rival, and Boccaccio, in his desire of fame, sought a sphere in which he might not only not be second, but be without an equal. His patronage of learning, therefore, may be chiefly ascribed to a genuine wish for its diffusion, as useful to his countrymen and mankind in general. He knew its value, as the citizen of a turbulent Republic, where the laws required the additional support which could be only found in the wisdom and improved habits of the people: and few men had had more opportunities of proving its value, as a means of lightening sorrow, and of affording consolation in seasons of comparative desertion. Towards the close of his life these convictions became doubly strong, and the deepest impressions of religion were obeyed in concert with the duties which appertained to him as a scholar. For this Boccaccio

merits the respect of the latest posterity; and knowing, as we do, that the licentiousness of too great a portion of his life and works was followed by the most sincere repentance, we may honour his memory without hesitation, and place his name with gratitude among the chief fathers and promoters of modern learning.

The works of Boccaccio, besides the Decameron, are, 1. De Genealogia Deorum. De Montium Sylvarum, etc. Nominibus. 2. De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium. 3. De Claris Mulieribus. 4. Eclogæ. 5. Epistola ad T. Martinum. 6. Testamentum. These, as the reader will perceive by the titles, are all in Latin. His minor prose works in Italian are, 1. Il Filocopo ovvero Amorosa Fatica, cioè Il libro degli Amori di Florio e di Biancofiore. 2. L'Amorosa Fiammetta, nella quale si contengono i dolori, i litigi, et i piaceri, che in amore si provano. 3. Origine, Vita e Costumi di Dante Alighieri. 4. Ameto ovvero Commedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine. 5. Laberinto d'Amore, altrimenti detto il Corbaccio. 6. Epistola confortatoria mandata a Pino de Rossi. 7. Lettere. 8. Testamento. His Italian poems are, 1. La Teseide. 2. L' Amorosa Visione, nella quale si contengono cinque Trionfi, cioè Trionfo di Sapienzia, di Gloria,

di Ricchezza, di Amore, e di Fortuna. 3. Il Filostrato, che tratta dell' innamorato Troilo, e della Greseida, e di molte altre infinite battaglie. 4. Ninfale Fiesolano, nel quale si contiene l'inamoramento di Africa e di Mensola, ed i loro accidenti e Morte. 5. Rime. 6. Commento sopra la Commedia di Dante Alighieri.

The Life of Lorenzo de' Medici.

Lorenzo de' Medici.

THE life of this celebrated man affords one of the many proofs which may be urged, that the cultivation of elegant literature is far from being incompatible with great skill and industry in the affairs of the world. "For the conceit," says Bacon,* "that learning should dispose men to leisure and privateness, and make men slothful, it were a strange thing if that which accustometh the mind to a perpetual motion and agitation should induce slothfulness; whereas, contrariwise, it may be truly affirmed, that no kind of men love business for itself but those that are learned."

* "Advancement of Learning."

Among the instances which the philosopher has given to illustrate his position, we may truly say that not one excels the subject of this memoir in the union of activity in business with the love of letters.

The family of the Medici was already the most powerful in Florence, when the birth of Lorenzo, on the first of January 1448, afforded a promise that its honours would not be speedily extinguished. His father was Piero, son of Cosmo de' Medici, and his mother, Lucretia Tornabuoni, a lady of great talent and estimation, was only inferior in family distinction to her husband. To the care and ability of this excellent woman, Lorenzo was indebted for his first acquaintance with literature, and the taste he acquired for the fine arts in early youth. Under her superintendence he made rapid progress in every species of elementary study, and he had scarcely left the nursery when the assistance of Gentile d' Urbino, a learned and devout churchman, was engaged in his education, and from him he is supposed to have imbibed those deep principles of piety which, more especially at the latter period of his life, characterized his sentiments. Cristoforo Landino, who had been shortly before elected to the professorship of poetry and

rhetoric in Florence, was also employed in directing his studies as he advanced in years, and with this celebrated scholar were subsequently associated the Platonic philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, and Argyropylus, equally distinguished for his acquaintance with the principles of Aristotle.*

With these advantages, added to his own natural ability, Lorenzo made rapid advances in learning; and his father, Piero, whose infirm constitution prevented him from fulfilling all the duties of his station in the Republic, rejoiced at the early maturity of his son's mind. This was still more the case when, at the death of Cosmo, he found himself at the head of affairs, and, notwithstanding the general popularity of his name, exposed to the machinations of a faction then beginning to gain ground in the city. In order to prepare Lorenzo for the active life he was likely to pass, and at the same time strengthen his connexions with other states, he sent him, shortly after he attained his sixteenth year, to several of the Italian courts, the most reputed at the time for the wisdom of their politicians and their influence in the country. Pisa, Rome, Venice, Milan, and other cities were visited by Lorenzo during this journey, and if we may

* Valori. Roscoe's Lorenzo de Medici.

judge from the confidence which his father placed in his opinion at this early period of his career, he must have been a prodigy of prudence and penetration as well as literary talent.

The importance of these qualities in the present situation of his family was quickly apparent. Shortly after his return, not only the authority but the life of Piero was threatened by a conspiracy, at the head of which were the three most powerful men in the Republic, Luca Pitti, Agnolo Acciajuoli, and Niccolo Soderini. Of these, the first was excited by personal resentment, the second by private ambition, and the third only by any desire for the welfare of his country. Unfortunately, however, for the Medici, they were assisted by a number of the most influential merchants of Florence, whose resentment Piero had injudiciously provoked by suddenly calling in the money he had advanced to them. Each of the actors was thus instigated by motives sufficiently strong, and the most desperate among them proposed the immediate assassination of Piero. However atrocious this proposition may appear, it was attended to, and would have been carried into effect had not the caution of Lorenzo defeated the design. He was riding to Florence from his

father's country-seat when he met on the road a party of armed men whose appearance, and some intimation he had received of the existence of a plot, left him little reason to doubt of their intention. Answering the questions they put to him respecting his father so as to deceive them in their pursuit, he turned his horse into a by-path and reached home time enough to warn Piero of his danger and conduct him by a circuitous route in safety to Florence, where he was speedily surrounded by his numerous adherents. The conspirators were totally defeated, and the principal of them suffered the entire ruin of their fortunes, so indignant were the citizens in general at their attempt.*

The chief actor in the whole of this affair was Lorenzo, and when the danger was over, and public opinion encouraged the partizans of his family to pursue its fallen enemies, he wisely discountenanced the principle, and his politic moderation had the effect of conciliating some of his father's most inveterate adversaries. So highly did the best politicians of Italy esteem him for the measures he had pursued, that the King of Naples wrote to inform him of the satisfaction he felt

* Valori. Tenhove.

on learning his judicious proceedings, which gave a certain promise, he said, of the advantages which both Florence and his father would derive from his future exertions.

The peace that followed these disturbances was commemorated with public rejoicings, which deserve mention here because they not only brought Lorenzo again before the public, but gave rise to two poems, much celebrated at the time, and entirely devoted to his honour and that of his brother Giuliano. The fifteenth century was the period in which public shows of all kinds were exhibited with singular splendour. Chivalry was beginning to change its more stern and martial character for gayer attributes, and the wealth which the mercantile States of Italy were rapidly accumulating enabled them to indulge without restraint the popular love of spectacles. A tournament accordingly was held at Florence on the above occasion, and Lorenzo and his brother were amongst the foremost of the combatants; both distinguished themselves for their noble bearing, but the former especially by obtaining the silver helmet, the reward of the most accomplished and valiant knight. The poems written to commemorate the triumphs of the youthful Medici were by Luca Pulci and

Politiano, the former the author of the Giostra of Lorenzo, the latter of the Giostra of Giuliano.

It is supposed that Lorenzo was in the twentieth year of his age when these events took place; and, in a work written about the same period by Landino, entitled "Disputationes Camaldulenses," we find one of the speakers thus addressing him; "Although, Lorenzo, you have given proof of such virtues as would induce us to think them rather of divine than human origin; although there seems to be no undertaking so momentous as not to be accomplished by that prudence and courage which you have displayed, even in your early years; and although the impulse of youthful ambition, and the full enjoyment of those gifts of fortune which have often intoxicated men of high reputation and great virtue, have never yet tempted you beyond the just bounds of moderation; yet, both you and that Republic which you are shortly to direct, or rather which now reposes in a great measure on your care, will derive important advantages from those hours of leisure, which you may pass either in solitary meditation, or social discussion on the origin and nature of the human mind." Such was the opinion which was publicly expressed of the talents of Lorenzo, and of the honours which await-

ed him as the first citizen of Florence—an opinion which, it seems, young as he then was, had already been long gaining ground in the Republic.*

But to this period of his life is also to be ascribed his first regular attempts as a poet; and we fortunately possess as full an account of this commencement of his literary career as the most curious could desire. Like Dante, he conceived the idea of writing a commentary on his own poems—an idea which could certainly only enter a poet's mind, when, generally speaking, learning and philosophy were in far higher repute than the offsprings of imagination. But, like the Vita Nuova, such illustrations are not without their value, serving, as they do, to illustrate many points in the lives of their authors, which otherwise would have been left in impenetrable obscurity. In this respect the note appended by Lorenzo to his first sonnet is of no small use to the biographer, since it is not unlikely that the circumstances he has there particularly mentioned would have been passed over by writers more intent on the events of his life, than on the progress of his mind or feelings. According to his own account, the death of a beautiful girl, whose virtues and personal

* Roscoe.

attractions were the theme of all tongues, was the first occurrence which sufficiently affected his sympathies to make him a poet. "All the eloquence and wit of Florence," says he, "were exerted in honour of her memory. I, among others, composed a few sonnets, and, that I might write with the more earnestness, I strove to believe that I had been deprived of the object of my love, and thus awaken in my bosom those affections which might give me the greater power over the sympathies of others. Under the impulse of my imagination thus excited, I began to reflect how severe was the lot of those who had tenderly loved the lady they were lamenting; and I then considered whether there were not any other in Florence who deserved equal admiration, and how great would be his happiness who could find such a subject for his muse. I accordingly searched, but at first without success, for a lady who should merit a long and devoted love. I had nearly resigned all hope of success, when chance supplied what had failed to reward the most careful inquiry, as if the god of love had selected this hopeless period to give me a more conspicuous proof of his power. A public festival was held at Florence, at which were present all the nobility and beauty of the city. Some of my com-

panions, inspired, I suppose, by destiny, carried me thither against my will, for I had, for some time avoided such exhibitions; and, when I did attend them, it was rather in obedience to custom than from inclination. But, among the ladies assembled on the present occasion, I beheld one, so sweet and attractive in her appearance and manners, that I could not help saying, as I looked at her, 'If this person possess the delicacy, the understanding and accomplishments of her who is lately dead, she certainly excels her in the charms of person!' Resigning myself," he continues, "to the fascination, I endeavoured to discover, if possible, how far her manners and conversation did really agree with her appearance; and I found her, in this respect, endowed with so many singular graces, that it was difficult to determine whether her person or her mind were the more lovely. Her beauty was, as I have already said, astonishing. She was of a just and proper height: her complexion extremely fair, but not pale—blooming, but not ruddy. Her countenance was serious, without any degree of sternness—mild and courteous, without levity or vulgarity; and her eyes were lively, without expressing either conceit or pertness. Her whole shape was so exquisitely propor-

tioned, that, amongst other women, she appeared with superior dignity, but with a grace that partook neither of formality nor affectation. In walking, in dancing, and in all exercises which display the figure, every motion was elegant and proper. Her sentiments were always just and striking, and have furnished materials for some of my sonnets. She always spoke at the right time, and always to the purpose, so that nothing could be added, nothing taken away. Though her remarks were often keen and pointed, yet they were so tempered as never to offend. Her understanding was superior to that of her sex in general, but it never made her guilty of arrogance or presumption; and she uniformly avoided that error so common among women who think themselves sensible, of making herself insupportable, by attempting to talk on every subject that came before her. To number all her excellencies, however, would exceed my present limits, and I, therefore, conclude with affirming, that there is nothing which can be desired in a lovely and accomplished woman, which was not to be found in her. So charmed was I, therefore, that not a power or faculty of my body or mind remained any longer at liberty, and I could not avoid thinking that the lady lately

dead was but as the star of Venus, which, at the approach of the sun, is wholly eclipsed by its superior brightness." The following is the sonnet to which the above account was attached.

Lasso a me, quando io son la dove sia
Quell' angelico, altero, e dolce volto,
Il freddo sangue intorno al core accolto
Lascia senza color la faccia mia :
Poi mirando la sua, mi par sì pia,
Ch' io prendo ardire, e torna il valor tolto,
Amor ne' raggi de' begli occhi involto
Mostra al mio tristo cor la cieca via ;
E parlandogli alhor, dice, io ti giuro
Pel santo lume di questi occhi belli,
Del mio stral forza, e del mio regno honore,
Ch' io sarò sempre teco ; a ti assicuro
Esser vera pietà che mostran quelli :
Credogli lasso ! e da me fugge il core.

Ah me ! whene'er that form I chance to view,
Divine, august, and gracious—round my heart
I feel through all my veins the cold blood start,
And from my pale cheeks steal their wonted hue—
Then, while her looks new pity seem to yield,
And, valour lost, returning hopes obey,
Love, in the rays of her fair eyes concealed,
Finds to my sorrowing heart his secret way.

And thus he speaks—Even by the holy light
Of those bright-beaming eyes, I swear to you,
And by my kingdom's law—my arrow's might—
That I will never leave thee, and that true
The pity is which those bright eyes impart.
Alas! I trusting heard, and from me fled my heart!

In many of the sonnets written by Lorenzo to celebrate this his first love, the prevalence of a better taste may be observed than that which appears in the similar compositions of Dante and several other distinguished writers. It is, not, however, to be supposed that our bard was able to escape the trammels of learned fashion, or that his amatory productions are not generally more imbued with philosophy than passion. But it speaks well for his natural ability, that his muse seems to have frequently yielded a not unwilling obedience to his heart, and that it was not till he made his love a study, and mixed up his visions of the beautiful Lucretia with Platonic theories, that his verses became harsh and metaphysical. With regard to the truth or reality of his passion, we may make the same observation as is called forth by the recollection of Beatrice and Laura — though the poetic beauty of certain feelings may be destroyed

by their being falsely expressed, or joined with ideas which have no relation to the sentiments inspired, the feelings themselves may exist uninjured in the heart of the writer—the only thing fairly proved by the too erudite and unnatural tone of his language being, that his ambition of appearing learned and ingenious made him reject the simple dictates of his passion; an ambition, we may add, which might have been altogether inspired by the wish of attracting the attention of his mistress. It is true, as has been ingeniously observed by Mr. Roscoe, that poetry seems to have made him a lover, whereas, in most instances, it is love which makes the poet: but, if poetry made Lorenzo desirous of finding a mistress, it might not be poetry which made him select Lucretia for the sole object of his muse; and if it were, can there be any better proof that she was endowed with charms which might well give birth to a real passion, than her being chosen for the most glowing themes of a young poet's muse? Did we take the learned affectations which have disfigured poetry in certain ages as a proof that no true feeling existed in the minds of the writers, we must believe that human passion is subject to as many ebbs and flows as tastes which are conventional, and that half the former

writers of poetry and romance had wholly forsworn their natures before they began to exercise their art. It is also not unworthy, perhaps, of remark, that the very same affectations for which Lorenzo and others have lost their reputation as true lovers, are abundantly spread over compositions which have never been regarded as deficient in the expression of genuine feeling; our older dramatists, and Shakspeare himself, having delighted, according to the fashion of their age, to throw the dust and ashes of conceit into the pure and living streams that flowed from their hearts.

But whether the passion of Lorenzo was true or pretended—whether Lucretia, who was the daughter of a Cavalier Corso, a strenuous Guelf, was disinclined to receive his addresses, or the addresses were themselves only feigned—her admirer was induced to obey the wishes of his father, and marry the daughter of Giacopo Orsini, a member of that distinguished family which we have seen in the time of Petrarch contending with the Colonni. The nuptials were celebrated on the fourth of June 1469, and with all the magnificence which it might be supposed would attend the union of two such noble and powerful families. It has been conjectured that Lorenzo had not even seen

his wife till the period of their marriage; but a short letter which he wrote to her from Milan, whither he made a journey about a month after they were united, gives us reason to believe that she had not failed to overcome this disadvantage. "I am in good health," says he, "which I have no doubt will please you more than any thing, except my return; at least I think so from the desire I myself feel to be again with you. Associate as much as possible with my father and sisters. I shall use all the haste in my power to return to you, for it will seem a thousand years till I see you again."*

This journey to Milan was occasioned by an invitation his father had received, to stand sponsor to the son of the Duke Galeazzo Sforza; but the infirmities of Piero not permitting him to undertake the journey, Lorenzo was sent as his proxy. The grandeur of his retinue, the elegance of his manners, and, above all, the liberality with which he returned the attentions he received, won him the universal favour of the Court; and having presented the Duchess with a gold necklace and a diamond, of which the worth was computed at three thousand ducats, "he was," says he jocosely,

* Valori.

on that account, "requested by the Duke to be sponsor to all his other children!"

On the death of his father, which happened in 1471, Lorenzo, notwithstanding his youth, was acknowledged, through the influence of Tommaso Soderini, head of the Republic.* He at the same time received addresses expressive of esteem for his father and attachment to himself, from various States of Italy, and the popularity he enjoyed among the greater part of his fellow-citizens, promised him a long enjoyment of the dignity with which they had invested him. Giuliano also was not more than sixteen, and was of too amiable and gentle a disposition to be regarded with jealousy, even had he been much older. All things, therefore, conspired to give a propitious appearance to Lorenzo's situation, and the manner in which he conducted himself procuring him additional regard, he was chosen Syndic of the Republic in December 1470, and in the following year received a visit from the Duke of Milan, whom he entertained with regal magnificence.

But a few months afterwards, public events called for his exertions in a different manner. On the death of Paul II., which occurred in

* Tenhove's House of Medici.

July, Sixtus IV. ascended the Papal chair, and Lorenzo having been deputed by the State to congratulate him on his accession, he was elected treasurer of the Roman See, and during his stay in the capital purchased a number of the superb jewels collected by the predecessor of Sixtus, which he sold again to various Princes, acquiring considerable profit by the speculation.* He also purchased several works of ancient art, with which he enriched his native city, and employed all his powers of persuasion to acquire a cardinal's hat for his brother Giuliano; but in this he found himself continually baffled, and his hopes were finally frustrated by the evident ill-will of Sixtus.

In 1472, Lorenzo was at Pisa, employing both his influence and wealth in the re-establishment of the academy there, which had for some time past been in a state of decay; and in the following year he was busily engaged in forwarding the views of Louis XI. of France, who wished to ally his eldest son with a daughter of the King of Naples, but the negociations were rendered fruitless by the disinclination of the latter to the project.

These, however, were events of very minor im-

* Roscoe.

portance when compared with those of which the immediate causes were in active operation. Sixtus IV. was a pontiff whose present indifference to the duties of his station could only be equalled by the previous licentiousness of his life. His illegitimate offspring, who were numerous, were provided for, not only from the treasures of the church, but by territories seized from unoffending princes. The ambition and lawless violence which thus distinguished the conduct of the pontiff, could not fail to alarm as well as disgust the other states of Italy, and in order to secure themselves against the attempts which they saw reason to fear might be made on their independence, Florence, Milan, and Venice, formed a league for mutual defence. That there might seem nothing invidious in this proceeding, the Pope and the King of Naples, who was supposed to encourage the former in his injustice, were invited to join the confederacy, but the proposition, as had been expected, was rejected.

Affairs continued in this posture till the year 1476, when the murder of the Duke of Milan, who appears to have provoked his fate by the most flagrant tyranny, brought them still nearer to a crisis. Whether it was considered that the confederacy being broken by the assassination of one

of its members, left the others an easy prey to their enemies, or that Sixtus had found some new cause of hatred to the Medici, he determined on the instant destruction of the two brothers, and engaged in the infamous project his nephew and grand-nephew, Girolamo and Raffaello Riario, the former Lord of Imola and Forli, and the latter, though a very young man, a Cardinal. To these he added the Pazzi, a noble Florentine family, old rivals of the Medici, and on one of whom he had already bestowed the office of treasurer, formerly enjoyed by Lorenzo. Besides these, several other persons, but of inferior note, were induced to share in the conspiracy, and among the chief of these secondary agents to Sixtus, was the Archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Salviati, with his brother Giacopo Bernardo Bandini, a man only known for his lawless character, and Montesicco, one of the Pope's condottieri. The preparations for the final execution of the plan were completed with the most politic caution, and two thousand men were ordered to assemble in the neighbourhood of Florence to protect the conspirators. The Cardinal Riario and the Archbishop Salviati, pretending to be on a visit to those noblemen, arrived at the residence of the Pazzi, a short distance from Florence, the former expect-

ing, it seems, to be invited by Lorenzo to his seat at Fiesole, where it was intended that he and his brother should be made the victims of these machinations. The sickness, however, of Giuliano, prevented the consummation of the design, though the hospitality of Lorenzo afforded the desired opportunity of access to his palace. It was therefore resolved, that the following Sunday, when the two brothers were expected to attend divine service, should be the period of their assassination, and that the mortal blow should be struck at the moment when the officiating priest elevated the host.

The appointed day arrived. The Cardinal came with his suite to Lorenzo's house in the city, and every thing was adjusted according to the wish of the conspirators. Giuliano was absent, but two of the assassins, proceeding to hasten him, met him on the way to the church, and embracing him with pretended affection, had the satisfaction to find that he was without either arms or armour. The service began, and went on without interruption till the Priest elevated the host; at that instant, and when all the congregation was occupied in profound devotion, Giuliano fell beneath the dagger of Bandini. The blow was repeated again and again by one of the Pazzi; and in the mean time, others of the

party attacked Lorenzo with equal fury, but less fatal success. Defending himself with his sword in one hand, and his cloak, which he had hastily thrown off, in the other, he resisted the assailants till his adherents had time to recover from their fright and astonishment, and could rally round him. In the midst of his faithful friends he was conveyed out of the church; but, though preserved from death, he was severely wounded in the back of the neck, and it was not till the wound had been sucked by one of his domestics, that his friends would believe him safe. The attempt made by the conspirators on the palace was not more successful. They were defeated and taken prisoners, and most of them suffered the reward of their crimes either from the hands of the populace, or by the sentence of the Government. The Archbishop with his brother were hung from the windows of the palace, the former in his robes; and the young Cardinal Riario, who protested his perfect ignorance of the plot, but whose countenance never recovered its proper complexion, so great had been his terror, was the only one of the principals who escaped a similar fate. Bandini found his way to Constantinople, but instead of obtaining shelter, as he had felt sure of doing, in the Court of

the Ottoman, he was seized by his order, and sent back to Florence; for which mark of respect to its chief citizen, the Republic by a formal embassy, returned the Sultan its grateful acknowledgments.

Nor did the people rest contented with showing their attachment to Lorenzo by the summary punishment of his enemies; they continued to prove their anxiety for his safety by thronging in crowds about his palace, and would not rest contented till he appeared in person to assure them that his wounds were not dangerous. Giuliano was lamented with every mark of affection, and the power of the survivor seemed established on a firmer foundation than ever by the violence it had suffered.

Lorenzo had no sooner regained strength and composure sufficient to attend to public affairs, than he discovered the necessity of taking immediate precautions against his still active and implacable enemies. Sixtus was neither defeated nor weakened by the discomfiture of a few conspirators; and the confinement of Riario, who had only been spared at the earnest entreaty of Lorenzo, served yet further to increase his malevolence. The King of Naples was also represented

to be similarly disposed, and it was at once apparent to the Republic that either its best supporter must fall a prey to his enemies, or it must prepare for his defence with the best forces it could command. Having the resolution to pursue the latter line of policy, it was shortly after encouraged in its determination by several of the other States of Italy uniting with it in a league against the Pope and his ally; so that Lorenzo found himself in a situation which, though still presenting many dangers, was far from being so perilous as it at first appeared.

The conduct he had employed while still a very young man, and when opposing the enemies of his father, he now pursued towards those who threatened his own life and fortune. Being aware of the evils to which a war with Sixtus and his allies would expose the Republic, he manifested the utmost readiness not only to pardon all who had been in any way connected in the late conspiracy, but bestowed on many of them marks of favour and attachment. The young Cardinal Riario was permitted to return to Rome; the relations of Salviati were received into notice, and even the relatives of the guilty Pazzi were restored to their honours and family possessions.

But this conciliatory conduct of Lorenzo seems only to have had the effect of encouraging the Pontiff to pursue his intended measures with the greater vigour. Having deprived all the Florentines resident at Rome of their property and liberty, and rejected with scorn the offers of the ambassador sent by the State to negociate a pacification, he published a Bull of excommunication against Lorenzo and the magistrates of Florence, at the same time suspending the clergy from their functions. This conduct, as unjustifiable as it was intemperate, was met on the part of the Republic with measures which demonstrated how superior were the rulers of that little free State in wisdom, to the presumptuous and self-willed head of the Church. Declaring their unchangeable determination to defend Lorenzo, whatever might be the consequence, they resisted both the threats and persuasions employed by the Pope to obtain possession of his person; and not contenting themselves with this mere assertion of his worth, they openly accused Sixtus of having been the great promoter of all the troubles which had lately taken place.

The war, which was thus rendered unavoidable, was almost immediately commenced; but not before Lorenzo had offered to resign himself to the

Pope, and earnestly persuaded his fellow-citizens to allow him to take that measure. We cannot stop to relate the circumstances of the contest, or of the several attempts which were made to bring the Pope to more amicable sentiments; but at length a truce was agreed upon, and when Lorenzo discovered that the measures which had been pursued in his favour had nearly reduced his country to a state of ruin, he finally resolved that no circumstances whatever should prevent his taking the step he had originally proposed. To this desperate measure he was perhaps further instigated by observing the impatience with which the people were beginning to bear the hardships occasioned by the war, and their discontent at which threatened, unless a speedy remedy were found, to deprive him entirely of his influence in the city.

Few instances are on record of a bolder or more magnanimous conduct, than that now pursued by Lorenzo. Unknown to any one, and unattended, he left Florence in the month of December, with the intention of proceeding direct to Naples, and trusting his fate to the good or ill success which might attend him in the Court of one of his greatest enemies. From Sanminiato he addressed a letter

to the magistrates of Florence, in which he explains the reasons of his proceedings, and expresses sentiments which are highly creditable to his character both as a man and a citizen. "I am willing," says he, after stating his opinion of the true posture of affairs; "I am willing to take this risk upon myself, since, being the object chiefly sought, the King, by his conduct to me, will at once discover what are his real intentions in relation to the Republic. As moreover I enjoyed among you more distinction than my personal merits rendered me worthy of, or than had been bestowed on any other citizen, it is evidently my duty to risk more than any one else in endeavouring to avert the evils by which it is threatened, should my life even prove the forfeit. Thus resolved, I go forth, and it may be the good pleasure of God to end by my means that war which had its commencement in mine and my brother's blood. My first and sole desire is, that, whatever be my lot, it may be productive of good to Florence. If I succeed in my enterprise, it will be well, for I shall then have procured peace both for myself and my country; and should it not be thus, I shall bear my troubles with patience, knowing that they are endured for the sake of my country, and that they must be productive of good

to it, by making manifest what are the true designs of its enemies. In this case, I trust that the citizens of Florence will not fail to protect their liberties to the last, and that, with the aid of Heaven, they will do so as successfully as their forefathers."

Inspired by the patriotic resolutions expressed in this letter, Lorenzo hastened to Pisa, to which place dispatches were sent him from Florence, declaring the anxiety felt there for his welfare, and directing him to negociate a peace with the King on any terms he chose to offer. On arriving at Naples, he was received by the monarch with every mark of respect, and using all the means which profound political wisdom, the command of great wealth, and accomplished manners put in his power, it was not long before he removed many of the difficulties and dangers which attended his negociations.

Not only did Ferdinand appear delighted by his manners, but also the courtiers, and the populace, whose favour he bespoke by his daily munificence, and the elegance of his appearance. The opposition, however, which he had to meet from the partizans of the Pope, and the temptation which the King was under to keep so great a man in his power now he was able, were two constant sources of

trouble; and confidently as he bore himself before his enemies, he had a part to play which called for all the energies of his comprehensive mind. At length, however, his efforts were crowned with success. Ferdinand agreed to conclude a treaty of peace with the Republic, and Lorenzo found himself free from the imminent peril to which he had so patriotically exposed himself.

Three months had now passed since he left Florence; and the negotiations were no sooner concluded than he hastened his departure home—a measure at which he had reason to rejoice, as he had scarcely sailed out of the bay when messengers arrived from the Pope, exhorting the King to detain their mutual enemy, and who had sufficient influence with Ferdinand to make him dispatch a letter to Lorenzo, requesting him to return, but which request, it is hardly necessary to add, was unattended to.

The arrival of their favourite fellow-citizen was greeted by the Florentines with every expression of joy and gratitude. The dreaded consequences of a protracted war were no longer to be apprehended, and though Sixtus still persevered in his resentment and hostilities, they might hope that complete tranquillity would in a short time be

restored. How long, however, the vindictive Pontiff might have continued to harass them with his attacks it is not easy to say, and they gladly availed themselves, therefore, of the threatening aspect of the Ottoman, to convince him that peace was necessary not only to theirs, but to his own safety, and to that of all Italy. Their arguments drawn from this source prevailed, and Sixtus again received the Republic into the maternal bosom of the Church.

Had Lorenzo been only a politician, or merely the ambitious head of a democratical government, his conduct in the management of the affairs just described, would have entitled him to our admiration. But he is to be regarded in a higher character than that of only a talented intriguer. While venturing his life for his native city, sometimes exercising the most agreeable accomplishments to win the favour of the multitude; at others plodding through the dry details of suspicious diplomatists, his mind was captivated with the most beautiful theories of ancient philosophy, and the stores of learning it had acquired in the free hours of youth. It is for this that Lorenzo is so truly deserving of the fame which he enjoys, and which renders his life so complete a comment on the words of the

great philosopher cited at the beginning of the memoir.

Peace having been established with the Pope, and the other States of Italy being deterred from domestic broils with each other by their fear of the Turk, Florence was now in the enjoyment of a tranquillity to which she had long been a stranger. Lorenzo gladly availed himself of the opportunity to recruit his strength by relaxing his attention to public business, and applying his thoughts almost solely to literary pursuits.

But repose was not long to be enjoyed in a state like Florence; and even had Lorenzo's natural love of action not prompted him to exertion, he would have found it constantly necessary to employ his political power and experience. In 1481 he was again the object of a conspiracy, but was again saved by the vigilance of his friends. Shortly after this attempt upon his life, he espoused the cause of the Duke of Ferrara, who, attacked by the Pope and Venetians, was on the point of falling beneath their superior force. By the most skilful management Lorenzo succeeded in dividing the allies and obtaining the support of Sixtus for the Duke. Peace was thus restored, and Florence had soon after to rejoice at seeing a Pontiff on the throne

who seemed ready to form a permanent friendship with their chief and ruling citizen. Clement VIII. is represented as a man of mild and amiable disposition, and at the present juncture of affairs in Italy such a Pontiff was greatly wanted to forward the re-establishment of order.

It is unnecessary for us to recount here the political transactions in which Lorenzo was now for some years almost entirely engaged. But the wisdom he displayed, not only in conducting the affairs of the Republic, but in the negotiations with which he was concerned for other States, obtained him the reputation of being the wisest and most prudent statesman in Italy. It was observed at the time, that with regard to Florence he had converted into iron what he had found formed of glass ;* and his English biographer observes, that he fully merited this compliment as well as that which he received from the annalist, Filippo de' Nerli, who describes him as the *balance point* of the Italian princes, and as keeping their sceptres in such exact equilibrium that no one could gain any dangerous preponderancy of influence. "Surrounded," continues that writer, "as he was by ambitious despots, who knew no restraint except that of com-

* Roscoe.

pulsion, or by restless communities constantly springing up with elastic vigour against the hand that pressed them, it was only by unwearied attention that he could curb the overbearing, relieve the oppressed, allay their mutual jealousy, and preserve them from perpetual contention. By inducing them to grasp at unsubstantial advantages he placed in their hands real blessings, and by alarming them with imaginary terrors averted their steps from impending destruction."

But however this may be, and though it has been questioned whether unmingled praise be due to Lorenzo in this respect, he was without doubt the greatest man of his age in the conduct of public affairs, and it is equally certain that Italy owed to him many years of comparative tranquillity, and the safety of thousands who would otherwise have perished by the sword of civil strife, or in bloody conflicts between neighbouring cities. Nor was it in his conduct only in respect to foreign States that he evinced so much prudence. Though tempted in a hundred different ways to enlarge the bounds of his authority over Florence, he confined his ambition so wisely, or directed it to such popular purposes, that, for the most part, he was regarded by his countrymen as

the firmest prop of the Republic,—as the stay on which it could safely rest, whatever were the perils which threatened it. The measures he pursued in this spirit were constantly attended with success, and the tranquillity which he had secured for the State was rendered glorious by the prosperity of a commerce of which he was also the most successful promoter. These things considered, it is not wonderful that he enjoyed at this period the most extensive reputation of any private individual in the world, or that monarchs even should seek his acquaintance and send ambassadors to him, not merely as chief of the Republic but as Lorenzo de' Medici. "It was, indeed," as Voltaire remarks, "as curious as it is foreign to modern customs, to see this citizen selling the merchandize of the Levant with one hand, and wielding the sceptre of the Republic in the other, discoursing with factors one hour and receiving ambassadors from mighty monarchs the next; at the same time resisting the Pope, making war and peace as he thought right, giving counsel to numerous princes, cultivating literature, delighting the people with public spectacles, and receiving with honour all the learned Greeks of Constantinople."*

* Roscoe.

There was not a citizen in Florence to whom the peace which had been won by the exertions and prudence of Lorenzo, was more grateful than to himself. His life henceforth presents us only with pleasing pictures of rural retirement and literary leisure; and few things can tend to give us a more favourable opinion of the character of this illustrious man than the gladness with which he seized every opportunity to resign the cares of state for the cultivation of poetry and philosophy. The first step he took preparatory to his present retirement was the liquidation of his debts, a task of no slight importance, as may be easily understood when it is considered, that he had not only spent very considerable sums in freeing himself from personal danger, but had greatly aided the Republic by drawing largely on his own revenues for the support of its wars. The same good management which had extricated him from the difficulties of his public life, would in a short time have freed him from the embarrassments in which he found himself involved at the establishment of peace. But the State, with a proper feeling both of justice and respect, settled the debts which had been contracted by him in his public capacity, and soon after passed an act for the payment of his

private ones, in which, it was understood, he had chiefly involved himself by his spirit and patriotism.

It was with a deep feeling of regret that he found himself obliged to be thus assisted, but he thenceforth retired from commerce and devoted his attention solely to the cultivation of his estates. His favourite country residence was at Poggio-Cajano, about ten miles from Florence, and the situation of which offered all the advantages that either the agriculturist or the poet could desire. The beautiful river Ombrone flowed round it, supplying it plentifully with fish, and giving continual verdure to the fields and pastures. Other smaller streams intersected different quarters of the estate, and were led by an aqueduct, constructed at an immense expense, for many miles over a broken and mountainous tract of country. The meadows produced three crops of hay in a year, the cheese made on the farm was sufficient for the supply of all Florence and its neighbourhood, and the orchards and gardens abounded every season with the most delicious fruits. In addition to this, his plantations of mulberry-trees were so extensive that his friends said laughingly, they expected he would occasion a reduction in the price of silk, and his

woods, round the villa were all well stocked with pheasants and peacocks which he had obtained from Sicily.

At Careggi, Lorenzo had another estate, smaller but almost equally calculated to delight the lover of rural retirement by the beauty of its situation and grounds. At Fiesole he had a third, and it was there he most frequently enjoyed the society of the learned men whom he delighted to assemble round him. Nor was the landed wealth of Lorenzo confined to these possessions in the neighbourhood of Florence; he had estates in many other parts of Tuscany, one especially, at Caffagiolo, which his grandfather Cosmo is said to have proudly admired, because all the land that he could see from his windows was his own.

The pleasure which Lorenzo took in the cultivation of his grounds, and other country occupations, accounts for the prevalence of rural images in his poetry. Few writers excel him in the variety or beauty of his descriptions; and, in his philosophical poems, he displays with equal taste his enthusiasm for learning, and his love of the country. Nor was the influence he exercised during his retirement less powerful than while he was seated in the council-chamber at Florence. Besides di-

recting the minds of men of genius to the cultivation of their native literature, he was the great promoter of the Platonic philosophy, which had been gaining ground in Tuscany since the time of his grandfather Cosmo. That celebrated man becoming acquainted with a learned Greek, named Gemisto Pletone, heard with delight his exposition of the Platonic doctrines. Not willing that such sublime knowledge should remain concealed or unfruitful, he determined to institute an academy for its study; and for this purpose had Marsiglio Ficino, the son of his physician, and then quite a lad, educated according to his directions, and instructed in the reading of Plato. Ficino's talents were worthy of the cultivation they received: he became one of the most learned philosophers known in modern times, and, in a short period, found himself at the head of an academy established according to the model left by his great master. Among the members of this institution were the famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Filippo Valori, who wrote the memoirs of our poet, Cristoforo Landini, and others of equal note. Lorenzo's mind was imbued, almost from infancy, with Platonism, and his favourite relaxation was to discourse with Ficino and his other friends on topics

connected with its elucidation. So enthusiastic was he in his admiration of the system, that he was known to say, that a man could be neither a politician, nor properly a Christian, without studying Plato:* an observation, it may be remarked, no less erroneous when applied to religion, than when applied to poetry, which it frequently was, as it would lead us to suppose that truth and beauty, pure and intelligible in themselves, are to be rendered more so by our viewing them through an artificial medium—an idea, however, long prevalent, and the effects of which were as hurtful to the imagination as the reason, to the Muse as to the Church. But Lorenzo, conceiving that he was promoting the true interests of learning by these studies, omitted nothing which might render them more popular. To this end, he resolved to re-establish the solemn commemoration of Plato's birth and death, both which, it was said, occurred on the fifteenth of November, a day kept sacred for many years by all his ancient disciples. Lorenzo had every facility for putting such a design in practice, and his Platonic festivals were long celebrated for the learned discussions which took place at them, for their influence on the minds of

* Valori.

educated men, and the elegance and hospitality which marked them as social meetings.

The love which Lorenzo felt for his country did not prevent his cherishing an anxious desire to establish the dignity of his family by every honourable means in his power. The time of life at which he was now arrived rendered him the more solicitous on this point, and every thing seemed to aid him in the accomplishment of his wishes. Three sons and four daughters were the survivors of a still more numerous family borne him by his wife Clarice. Of the former, Giovanni, his second son, became the celebrated Leo X., and Giuliano, the next in age, was elevated to the Dukedom of Nemours. Piero, the eldest, was not so fortunate; but his adversities were owing to his own misconduct and vices. In the education of these sons, Lorenzo employed the most talented of the learned men who frequented his house, and always professed to consider their instruction as one of the first and most necessary of his cares. By his politic management of the influence he now possessed at the court of Rome, he succeeded in obtaining for Giovanni a rich abbey before he was eight years old, and saw him elevated, by the time he was thirteen, to the rank of a Cardinal—the first

instance that had occurred of an ecclesiastic's obtaining that dignity at so early an age.

But, while rejoicing in the success which thus attended his exertions, he had the misfortune to lose his wife, for whom he appears to have cherished a strong and uniform affection. This event took place in August 1488, and, to add to the affliction, it occurred during his absence from home. At the commencement of the year 1492, his health, which had been gradually growing worse, began to show signs of a still more rapid decline, and he was, shortly after, attacked by a fever, which, though slow, and at first scarcely perceptible in its effects, was soon beyond the power of his physicians to eradicate. He was himself conscious of his danger, and, composing his mind to serious reflection, was thenceforth almost wholly occupied in conversing or meditating on subjects of religion. In this solemn preparation for his last hour, he was aided by the studies of his youth. He had been, it was said by his enemies, guilty of excesses which ill became his character, and some of his poetry is justly termed light and licentious; but the feelings of piety and devotion implanted by the early habits of his mind, were never effaced, nor was the general course of his

life adverse to these principles. His conduct as a father was irreproachable, and there seems to be strong evidence to prove that it was so as a husband. In the almost boundless transactions which he carried on as a merchant, he was distinguished for his liberality and probity; and, in his public character, his ambition appears never to have destroyed his patriotism. His treasures were always open to the wants of the Republic, and we have seen how ready he was on all occasions to sacrifice his ease, which he knew so well how to enjoy, and even his personal safety for the good of his countrymen. His care for their religious wants was shown by the building or reforming of several religious houses, the most esteemed mark of piety in those days; while the hymns of his composition which still remain, are written in the most fervent style of devotional eloquence.

As death approached, he desired to partake in the last and most solemn rites of the Church; which having done, he called his son Piero to his bedside, in order to give him the counsel which might be necessary to his respectability in the situation he would shortly occupy. "You are not" said he, in one part of the conversation, "to expect that in a Republic, which, though but one body, has many

heads, "you can always conduct yourself so as to please every one:—remember, therefore, on all occasions to pursue the line of conduct marked out by the strictest integrity, and to regard the interests of the whole, not the wishes of a part of the community." Soon after this interview between Lorenzo and his son, Poliziano, his old and affectionate friend, and who has so pathetically described the interview in one of his letters,* entered the room. The sick man took his hands, and clasping them strongly, looked him at the same time in the face with a smile so tender and composed, that Poliziano was unable to refrain from weeping. Lorenzo still held the hands of his friend, expecting the emotion would cease, but loosened his grasp when he found it continue, and Poliziano, in an agony of sorrow, hastened out of the room. On his return to the chamber, Lorenzo inquired after Pico of Mirandola, and expressed a desire to see him. This wish was immediately attended to, and he conversed for some time with his learned acquaintances with a calmness and cheerfulness which astonished and charmed them. Savonarola, the Prior of St. Mark's, a haughty churchman and the great enemy of the Medici, next arrived, and

* Lib. iv. Ep. 2.

examined him as to the state of his mind and conscience; but he chiefly came, it is supposed, to aid his own purposes, which were to overthrow, on the first opportunity, the power of the family; this, however, he failed in doing, and fell a victim to his ambitious fanaticism. Lorenzo was not ignorant of his disposition; but, on his leaving the room, he called him back, and requested his benediction, thus intimating his perfect forgiveness of the injuries he had plotted against him. After the departure of Savonarola, death made rapid and visible approaches: again, therefore, embracing his friends, and receiving the sacrament, he ceased from conversation, and appeared wholly occupied in silent devotion, only manifesting that he still lived by breathing out some text of Scripture and raising his eyes towards heaven. When the last moment arrived, he pressed the crucifix which he held to his lips, and in that act expired.

In summing up the character of this great man Mr. Roscoe observes, "To be absorbed in one pursuit, however important, is not the characteristic of the higher class of genius, which, piercing through the various combinations and relations of surrounding circumstances, sees all things in their just dimensions and attributes to each its due.

Of the various occupations in which Lorenzo engaged, there is not one in which he was not eminently successful; but he was most particularly distinguished in those which justly hold the first rank in human estimation. The facility with which he turned from subjects of the highest importance to those of amusement and levity, suggested to his countrymen the idea that he had two distinct souls combined in one body. Even his moral character seems to have partaken in some degree of the same diversity, and his devotional poems are as ardent as his lighter pieces are licentious. On all sides he touched the extremes of human character, and the powers of his mind were only bounded by that impenetrable circle which prescribes the limits of human nature."

With much of this eloquent praise the narrative of his life will incline most readers to agree; it may, however, be doubted whether it do not in some degree tend to a false estimate of his intellectual powers. That he was a great and noble-minded man is placed beyond the possibility of doubt by all that is known of his actions, and by many of his existing works. But we cannot perceive in the latter either that strength of imagination, which alone has the power to carry human

nature to the bounding circle of thought, or that deep, heart-born sweetness of moral feeling which can alone raise the character far above the ordinary level. The light of genius shone about his soul, but not from within it. He had the power of converting what was beautiful and majestic in the minds of others into the nourishment of his own—a power next to that of genius, and which when united with any portion of it makes men splendid and illustrious in their speech, writings, and actions; but it cannot bestow upon them that mysterious strength, that strange intelligence, which defies the analyses of metaphysical anatomy, and leaves the inquirer as it were on this side the grave while it passes to the other on the wings of an angel.

But the author of the Life of Lorenzo is far from being alone in the high opinion he has given of his literary powers. The eminent French historian of Italian literature* says, that the quality which most particularly characterizes the true poet is eminently conspicuous in the productions of Lorenzo; but when he describes this quality as that species of imagination which delights in representing the objects of nature, in uniting them by comparisons with the things described, and painting the objects themselves in bright and shining colours, he is

* Ginguené.

defining wit and fancy, in the refined species of which Lorenzo really excelled, but not the mighty and creative energy which is properly meant by the word imagination. The instances which the French critic cites in illustration of his remark are sufficient to show that it was not the higher powers of invention which Lorenzo possessed, but that poetical ingenuity which, united with a correct taste and quick perception of the beautiful, may inspire verses of great elegance and replete with striking images, but never such poetry as is alone deserving of the eulogiums passed on Lorenzo's. "It is thus," says the historian, "that in one of his sonnets he compares the tears which run down fair and rosy cheeks to a clear brook traversing a meadow enamelled with flowers." I can, for my own part, scarcely remember having ever seen a comparison more cold, insipid, or jejune. Few but very subtle wits, could think of an enamelled meadow on seeing a beautiful face; still more impossible does it seem that on watching the tears course each other along a fair and sorrowful countenance, we should find any resemblance between the melancholy face and a meadow enamelled with various-coloured flowers watered by a river. The other instances quoted are not at all more fortunate. Thus, in describing the inter-

course which his thoughts held with those of his mistress, he compares it to a sunbeam penetrating into a bee-hive through some little fissure in the structure; making the most of this idea, he describes both the bees and the flowery fields over which they roam, and the honey which they extract and lay up for the winter. M. Ginguené confesses that some persons may think all this *un peu bizarre*, but regards it himself as evidence of an imagination gay and fruitful, and of a singular talent for description. So far as fancy and ingenuity are concerned comparisons such as these may be received perhaps as proofs of fertility, but few persons will be found who would willingly undertake to show that they are the legitimate offspring of a high and rich imagination. The true merit of Lorenzo as a poet, and that which may in the fullest measure be ascribed to him, is his power of describing natural objects, and the nervous conciseness yet clearness and elegance of language with which he explained in verse the doctrines of philosophy. So far as these constitute poetic excellence, he deserved all that his admirers have said of him; but if we place them, admirable though they be, among the highest qualities of the poet, what more can be said of the sublime spirit which breathes in the "Inferno?" or of the light which suffuses like the splendour of a

heavenly morning the whole of the "Gerusalemme Liberata?"

The first of Lorenzo's longer compositions is that named "Altercazione," a poem devoted to the developement of the Platonic doctrines, in which he was eminently learned. This piece is among the most successful of his productions, and contains many pictures of rural scenes which charm the reader by their truth and freshness. The "Selve d'Amore," another of his longer poems, is written in the ottava rima, and is praised by the admirers of allegorical poetry as abounding in ingenious inventions and descriptions. The "Nencio da Barbareno," a rustic poem, and the first of the kind written in Italian, is greatly admired for its simplicity; while "La Caccia col Falcone," is almost equally attractive for its spirited details of the joys and mishaps attending the sport of hawking. Of this class of poems we have but one more to mention, namely, that entitled "Ambra," the name of his favourite villa at Poggio Cajaino, and which, notwithstanding the aqueduct he had constructed, was destroyed by the overflowing of the Ombrone. The religious poems of Lorenzo are arranged under the general titles Orazione and Laude, and contain many passages of great power and beauty. His address to the Deity was so famous among his

friends that some of them employed it in their devotions.

But the versatile genius of Lorenzo was not contented with even this variety of topics. He wrote a satirical poem, called "Beoni," or the Drunkards, in terza rima, which in many passages displays much acuteness and humour. Not neglecting to employ his powers for the promotion of his popularity, he composed several "Canti Carnascialeschi," or Carnival Songs, which the populace sung during the seasons of public festivity. For the same purpose nearly he wrote the drama, or rather mystery of Saint John and Saint Paul, not the apostles, but two slaves belonging to the daughter of the emperor Constantine, who were put to death by Julian the apostate. Lorenzo is supposed to have composed it to form part of the amusements given at the marriage of his daughter Madelena with the nephew of Innocent VIII., and to have had the characters represented by the different members of his family.* The chief merit of this production is, that it is less absurd than the old mysteries, the only dramatic compositions hitherto known in Italy since the decline of learning, and that it was the precursor of a more rational species of theatrical representations.

* Ginguené.

When we consider in how many departments of poëtical literature Lorenzo exercised his genius, and how much taste and ability he shewed in all his compositions, it scarcely seems surprising that he should have been flattered by his contemporaries as one of the greatest, and by some even as the greatest poet that Italy had yet produced. The splendour of his station, which had earned him the surname of the Magnificent, his wealth and power, had doubtless some influence with many, and when we find him praised in the letters of his friends as combining the beauties of Dante and Petrarch without their defects, we feel as if we had entered the proud halls of his palace, and were wholly dazzled by their grandeur. But without laying claim to eulogiums so excessive, his poetry, graceful and occasionally rich in ideas, is worthy of a conspicuous place among the classic productions of Italy. Its author has also an additional claim to reputation; he was one of the principal reformers of poetical literature: till he lived and wrote, his countrymen had been for a hundred years forgetful of the art, and the delicious stream of melody which had flowed forth at the command of Dante and Petrarch, had been suffered to lie concealed, or rather to be choked up by huge and massive

fragments of ill-digested learning. Lorenzo was among the first who set the fountain free again, and from his time, and greatly owing to his taste and genius, the Italian muse became conscious of the purity and sacredness of her native Helicon. Nor must it be forgotten, that of learning itself, Lorenzo was an enlightened as well as magnificent patron. The abilities of eminent men were not merely discovered or rewarded by him, they were constantly employed—a most essential circumstance to the utility of patronage—in the prosecution of works which might render their age and country illustrious, and promote the spread of intelligence. Their labours were seconded by the institution of academies; by collections of the most rare and valuable manuscripts; by the formation of museums and galleries for the remains of ancient art, and above all, by the constant interest which Lorenzo himself took in all their pursuits and discoveries; by his unintermitted personal intercourse with them, and the generous praise as well as protection which he bestowed upon their talents and labours.

The Life of Angiolo Poliziano.

Angiolo Poliziano.

Angiolo Poliziano was born on the 14th of July 1454, and is celebrated for his scholarship, poetical talents, and close intimacy with Lorenzo de' Medici. The town in which he first drew breath, Monte Pulciano, gave him the name by which he is generally known; but his father was Benedictus de Cinis, or De Ambroginis, a Doctor of Civil Law, and who, from the care which he bestowed on the education of his son, notwithstanding the smallness of his income, seems to have been a man of worth and ability. The most celebrated scholars of the day were the instructors of Angiolo, and, under Christoforo Landino,

Andronicus of Thessalonica, and Johannes Argyropylus, he made those rapid advances in erudition which rendered him, at an early age, the wonder of his country. But it was the favour of the Medici which placed him in a sphere where his brilliant abilities had fair scope for action, and were sure of being duly appreciated. Giuliano's triumph in a tournament, held shortly after that in which his brother carried off the prize, afforded the young scholar an opportunity of exercising his genius. The "Giostra," in which he celebrated this event, was in every way superior to that which had been written by Luca Pulci in honour of Lorenzo. The elegance of the style, the variety and liveliness of the descriptions, and the vigour of fancy which shone throughout this production, would have claimed no inconsiderable degree of praise had the author been arrived at the age when the faculties are usually matured. But Angiolo, at the period he wrote the "Giostra of Giuliano," was a mere youth, and had hitherto been almost solely occupied with classical studies and composition. It is asserted by many authors, that he was only fourteen when he produced this specimen of Italian verse, which, since the time of Petrarch, had been so much neglected, that the highest honour

due to Lorenzo is for his having restored it by his ability, and the example he set for its cultivation, to the attention which it merited.

This opinion, however, respecting his extreme youth has been controverted;* and it is said, that a poem so rich in variety of circumstances and imagery, and so nervous in expression, could never have been the production of a mere boy. Instead, therefore, of supposing that the "Giostra of Giuliano" was written in the year 1468, as asserted by some writers, it is contended that the publication of several Latin epigrams in 1471 first introduced him to general notice, but not to the particular patronage of Lorenzo, who had then been about two years in the enjoyment of his paternal rank and fortune. Soon after the publication, however, of these classical productions, the success of which was sufficiently encouraging, Poliziano conceived, it is further supposed, the idea of attracting the notice of Lorenzo, by writing an Italian poem, and dedicating it to that great patron of letters. No better subject could be found for the purpose than the Giostra of Giuliano, whom his brother tenderly loved, and by commemorating whose triumph, and dedicating the poem to Lorenzo, he

* Ginguené.

would secure the favour of the two most powerful and popular men in Florence. He pursued this politic plan, and produced the first part, and the only one ever written, of his celebrated poem; but he was then, if the opinion now mentioned be correct, in his nineteenth or twentieth year.

The principal authority cited in corroboration of this theory is the fourth stanza of the poem itself, in which the author addresses Lorenzo as the laurel under which Florence reposed in peace and security, fearing the storms of neither earth nor Heaven. I do not, however, see so much force in this argument as M. Ginguené did; for, in the first place, a poet writing to please a young patron, would feel himself in some degree allowed to anticipate the time when he would come to his inheritance, and enjoy the honours which his parent was endeavouring to increase and preserve for him; in this view of it the compliment was correct, and might be both given and received, though Piero were living at the time. So far also was it from being probable that the father would be jealous of his son's praise, that there was every reason to suppose it would gratify him; and this not merely from the pride of feeling common to parents in such circumstances, but from the peculiar desire

hé always manifested to put his son forward in public life, and place him in the conspicuous station, which, owing to his infirmities and fondness for retirement, he was himself unfit to occupy. Lorenzo was, from his first entrance upon the theatre of politics, the principal actor in affairs of importance. The ability and firmness of mind which he manifested on all such occasions, confirmed by a speedy popularity what he won from the affection of his father, and there were few citizens of Florence, after his defeat of the conspiracy in which Piero had so nearly perished, who would not have readily called him their shade and protector from civil storms.

The question, after all, is one of mere curiosity, and scarcely deserves the attention it has gained: whatever was the precise age at which the "Giostra" was written, it was rewarded by the friendship of Lorenzo, who continued till his death the benefactor of its author. It was, as has been observed, never extended beyond the first part, which, though occupying not less than twelve hundred lines, only introduces the hero in preparation for action. The commencement describes him as a youth surrounded by all the fascinating objects of pleasure, but guarded from their spells by Wis-

dom. The strongest passion he is supposed to feel is for the chase. Love resolves to overcome this inclination, which had already more than once marred his work: and to this end, while the young huntsman is engaged in his favourite sport, he raises up in his path the aerial form of a beautiful white hind, which flies rapidly before him, and from the pursuit of which he is unable to cease, till he finds himself alone, in the midst of wild and tangled woods, where he is accosted by a lovely nymph, at the sight of whose charms he forgets the hind, and remains till evening in conversation with the angelic visitant, when, twilight falling, the beautiful vision vanishes into air. Giuliano, after some time, discovers his companions, but retains the image of the phantom stranger impressed on his heart, and Love, considering his triumph almost complete, flies to his mother with the news. The description which the poet gives of Cyprus and the palace of Venus in this part of the work, is among the most brilliant passages of Italian poetry, and may vie with the captivating stanzas of Ariosto and Tasso, to some of whose descriptions they have been thought to give birth. The goddess expresses her joy at the intelligence of her son's

conquest, and determines that Giuliano, in order that his capture may be more honourable to Cupid, shall acquire some new glory, and an increase of celebrity. She therefore commands the Loves that hover around her to arm themselves, and, having hastened to Florence, to fill all the youth of that city with the fires they had stolen from Mars. Having finished this part of her scheme, she next desires the god of sleep to prepare, with the assistance of the Graces, such dreams for Giuliano as may assist her in the design she has in view. In his sleep, therefore, the youth beholds the lady he had seen in the forest, but with a countenance severe, and indicative of resolution, instead of being calm and gentle, as before. Her dress also seemed to have undergone a similar alteration, and she stood before him the perfect semblance of Minerva. Not lingering in gentle converse as at her first descent, she crowns him with laurel, and clothes him in a suit of golden armour! The dream fills the youth with astonishment, and his first thoughts on waking are employed in invoking the Goddess of War and Glory. Thus prepared for conquest, he proceeds to the tournament; but, as he is on the point of entering the lists, the poem

stops short, and the reader looks in vain for the brilliant pictures which it had prepared him to expect.

When we consider the low and uncultivated state to which Italian poetry was reduced at this period, the "Giostra of Giuliano" merits our highest admiration, and justly claims for its author the chief place among the poets of his time. Had he continued to cultivate his native language with the same eagerness as he did classical learning, there is the greatest reason to believe that he would not only have surpassed his contemporaries, but have been the fair rival of the men to whom the Italian Muse owes her present and undying renown. But unfortunately both for his fame and the literature of his country, the learned and philosophical spirit of the age overcame the brighter and more ethereal inspirations of poetry, and thus while it conferred one intellectual good on the world, it took away another, as if we had to pay for the light by which we walk or labour, by resigning that which gives life and beauty to the flowers.

It is not, however, difficult to suggest a variety of reasons for the comparative neglect which the native muse of his country subsequently suffered from Poliziano. He was by no means affluent, and

poetry was no more in those days than in our own a staff sufficiently strong to support a man who had any wants which books could not supply. Skill in classical composition was the surest road to patronage and employment, and was absolutely necessary to all who wished to pursue literature as a profession. The fame also which Poliziano had acquired by his Epigrams was as great, if not greater, than that which attended the publication of the "Giostra of Giuliano," while his own taste for Latin verse, and the superiority his facility gave him over many of his contemporaries, already famed for their learning, must have tended greatly to increase his attachment to the studies of his youth. The arguments in favour of the rival Muses were thus nearly equal, and it is not surprising, therefore, that when he was appointed tutor to Lorenzo's children, and became a distinguished member of his Platonic academy, he should have allowed his classical predilections to overcome his taste for the less elevated verse of his native language.

The friendship he enjoyed with Lorenzo was cemented by the similarity of their tastes, and proved of equal advantage to both; the one gaining by it an honourable support, the other a tutor for

his children, whose learning and character were alike suited for the trust. When Lorenzo became alarmed at the aspect of affairs in Florence, and sent his family for safety to Pistoia, Poliziano accompanied them thither, as he did also from thence to the estate at Caffagiolo, during their residence at which place he wrote several letters to his patron, describing the progress his pupils made in their studies, the manner in which they usually spent their time, and other circumstances which their father might be interested in learning. At other times, however, his letters contain bitter complaints against Clarice for interfering with his plans, and he begs the assistance of Lorenzo in asserting his authority over his pupils. To Lucretia, the mother of Lorenzo, he also wrote occasionally, and from the easy and playful tone of his letters, shows himself to have been on terms of intimate friendship with that venerable and highly accomplished woman. In one of these epistles he thus expresses himself. "I have no news to send you, but that we have such a continual fall of rain here that we are unable to leave the house for the enjoyment of our usual sports, and are, therefore, obliged to stay at home and amuse ourselves with childish sports. You would take me for melan-

choly itself, could you see me standing before the fire with my great coat and slippers. There is no variety in me: I neither see, hear, nor do any thing that gives me pleasure; the recollection of our calamities keeping entire possession of my thoughts whether I be waking or sleeping. We were rejoicing two days back at hearing that the plague had entirely disappeared; but we are again alarmed with intelligence that the symptoms have not all vanished. Were we but at Florence, we should at least enjoy the happiness of seeing Lorenzo when he returns home, but in this place we have no change or pause to our anxiety, and I am almost dead with continual solitude. The plague and the war are always in my thoughts. I sorrow for past distresses, and look forward for new; and amid this trouble and disgust, I no longer enjoy the society of my dear Madonna Lucretia, to whom, were she present, I might tell all my afflictions." The nature of Clarice's interference noticed above, may be understood from the letter in which he complains that she made Giovanni read the Psalter, which it may be supposed he considered hurtful to his taste for pure, classical Latinity. "It was wonderful," he says, "to see how rapid a progress his pupils made when their mother never

obtruded upon their studies, and he had free scope for the exercise of his authority." In conclusion, he assures his patron that there is no wish in his heart so strong as that of doing whatever could prove him faithful to his interests, and that he was ready to sacrifice himself, if it were necessary, or to submit his patience to any species of trial, if he could thereby better evince his attachment.

It is pleasing to learn, from the manner in which these letters are written, that Poliziano lived with his patron on terms of the closest intimacy, and that he retained the freedom and self-respect of a scholar while residing in the palace of the greatest man of Florence.

But the services he rendered to literature by his study of the classics, were not confined to the cultivation of an elegant Latin style; he was among the first and most laborious of critics, and spent much of his time in correcting the text of every ancient author which came before him. This he did with so much success that we are largely indebted to him for the comparative purity of many of the Latin classics, among which are Ovid, Suetonius, and the younger Pliny. Catullus he examined and improved in this manner before he was nineteen, and two years after he completed

a similar review of Propertius. To each of these Commentaries he affixed a memorandum, noting the period when it was written, but in that appended to the one on Propertius, he finds fault with his former labours, and begs the reader not to judge of his abilities from that imperfect specimen of them. Besides his regular Annotations, he gave to the world a collection of "Miscellanea;" which, he informs us, owed their existence principally to the conversations he held with Lorenzo, while they took the air together on horseback, and when he generally communicated the thoughts which had struck him during his morning studies. A still more important part of his labours was his correction of the Pandects of Justinian, the great fountain of justice at that period, but which had hitherto been suffered to remain dark and imperfect. Poliziano was induced to undertake this difficult task by the persuasions of Lorenzo, and the advantages judiciously afforded him for its successful prosecution. The copy of the Code, said to have been deposited at Pisa by Justinian himself, had lately been discovered, and having been conveyed to Florence, was placed in the hands of the critic, the immediate result of whose inquiries was the discovery of numerous and important errors in all

the manuscripts which formed the authorities of the jurisconsults of that and preceding ages. To the edition of the Pandects published at Venice in 1485, he appended his corrections and prefaces, the Greek laws omitted in it, and the variations between its text and that of the manuscript. The copy he employed on this occasion was safely deposited in Lorenzo's library; it was sent to Rome during the Pontificate of Leo X., but restored to Florence in that of Clement VII., and preserved there to the middle of the sixteenth century. About that period it was missing from the library, and every exertion to discover what had become of it proved vain, till in the year 1734 it was accidentally found among some books exposed to sale in an auction.*

Poliziano's reputation as a Grecian was equal to that of any scholar's in Europe. He had at an early period commenced a version of the Iliad in Latin verse; and when called to the professor's chair his lectures were attended by the greatest men in Florence. Our celebrated countryman, Thomas Linacer, one of the instructors Lorenzo chose for his children, and the profoundly erudite Pico della Mirandola were of the number, and contributed by

* Tiraboschi.

their praises to establish Poliziano's fame on the firmest foundation.

It was, however, far from being unassailed. Merula, a scholar of almost equal reputation, was among the first to threaten him, irritated by some contradiction of his opinions in the Miscellanea, but he died before his observations were published. Bartolommeo Scala was another of his enemies; but the fiercest of them was Michelle Marullo Tarcagnota, who had lately married Alessandra Scala, a woman of great learning, celebrated for her poetry, and regarded by Poliziano with a warmer feeling than simple admiration of her genius. Jacopo Sannazzaro joined in the quarrel, and wrote several epigrams against him; while in addition to opponents such as these were added several Greeks, whose rage was excited by his openly professing that he was better acquainted with their language than they were themselves. Among other things calculated to injure him, these rivals of his reputation asserted that a large portion of his works was taken without acknowledgment from other authors, and being able to prove the truth of this assertion in some minor instances, it required all the ability of which he was master to refute the more important parts of the charge.

Notwithstanding the opposition he had to encounter in his career, he retained the affection of Lorenzo to the last hour of that celebrated man's life; and through the interest of his patron and the rank he had obtained as a scholar, he was made secular prior of the collegiate church of St. Paul, was chosen one of the ambassadors appointed to congratulate Innocent VIII. on his accession to the papacy, and received letters full of praise and expressions of friendship from the kings of Portugal and Hungary, and most of the princes of Italy.

But the change which took place in the fortunes of the Medici, a few years after the death of Lorenzo, put an end to his prosperity. His attachment to the family, now become so unpopular, was universally known, and he was made to bear a full share of the evils inflicted on the relatives of his patron. When the savage, barbarian fury of the people destroyed the valuable Laurentian library, his books fell a prey to the same ebullition of popular rage; and this circumstance, with others of a similar kind, and the grief he felt at the death of Lorenzo, are supposed to have affected him so deeply that he gradually declined and died in consequence. Many absurd and flagitious stories were propagated respecting the immediate cause of his

death, but they are clearly owing to the hatred with which he was regarded by his rivals; and the most credible opinion is that he died a good Christian, surrounded by his friends, and devoutly partaking in the solemn rites of religion.

Whether we consider Poliziano as a poet or a scholar, we find ample reason to place him among the chief ornaments of his age and country; how much more is this the case when we see him uniting the liveliest imagination and the most elegant taste with an erudition as profound as it was extensive:—producing at one time a poem abounding in the richest beauties, and at another the most correct edition of the Pandects that the civilians of Europe had ever yet seen.

Poliziano, indeed, seems to have been the greatest man in Florence during his time, not excepting the variously accomplished Lorenzo himself; but before closing this memoir it may be as well to mention the names of three or four other poets who shared with him the admiration of their contemporaries. Among these were the Pulci, three brothers, Bernardo, Luca, and Luigi. They were of an ancient and noble, but decayed family, and their lives having been passed in the cultivation of literature, scarcely any particulars are on record respecting them.

Bernardo, the eldest, made himself conspicuous by an elegy on the death of Cosmo, and another on that of Simonetta the mistress of Giuliano; he was also the first author who translated the "Eclogues" of Virgil into Italian verse. Luca Pulci wrote the "Giostra of Lorenzo," but it is considered far inferior to that of Politian in honour of Giuliano; he also wrote the "Driades d' Amore," a poem possessing some merit, but too long and mythological to be admired; and the "Ciriffo Calvaneo," a sort of epic romance, and which, if it had been founded on historical tradition instead of being merely fanciful, might have been regarded as the first of Italian romanesque poems.

The most celebrated, however, of the three brothers was Luigi. He was born in 1431 and exhibited sufficient genius to secure the friendship of Lorenzo and that of his mother, Lucretia Torabuoni. At the instigation of that talented woman, he undertook the "Morgante Maggiore," on which depends his claim to the attention of posterity. This celebrated poem has occasioned considerable controversy among Italian critics, and it is not a little curious to find them disputing whether it be of a serious or comic character. Tiraboschi and others decide for the latter; while they are op-

posed by writers of equal eminence who contend that to suppose the Morgante Maggiore a mere comic poem is to evince an utter ignorance of Italian romanesque literature. The reader may find the arguments on both sides stated at length by Ginguené, and still later by Mr. Panizzi, in his learned and ingenious essay on the romantic poetry of his country. It would be foreign to my purpose to enter into the subject, but there appears to be so little reason to conclude that the Morgante is a burlesque poem because it has some rudely comic passages and characters, that it seems a matter of wonder how such an opinion could ever have gained ground. The opinion is pretty general that the author recited the different cantos as he composed them at the table of Lorenzo. It is highly probable that, in such a situation, he might be often prompted to exercise a species of wit for which he was famous, and which might be occasionally agreeable to his auditors; but it is not probable that he had no other object in the composition of a poem of such length, and recited before persons who were not in any way deficient in taste for the enjoyment of genuine poetry and all its accompaniments. A circumstance, also, which I do not remember to have seen mentioned in the dispute, ought to have some

weight in deciding the question. The poem is said to have been undertaken at the request of Lucretia, who wished to hear how the old romances respecting Charlemagne and his Paladins would sound in verse; it is far from being likely, I conceive, that Pulci would have replied to such a request by writing a poem intended to throw the whole subject into ridicule. The fact, indeed, seems to be, that he imitated the romance-writers as nearly as he could; and that in doing this he was not only obliged to introduce adventures and characters of a very droll description, but to affect a style and manner which, though serious in itself and as originally used, was continually bordering on the comic, especially when employed by a refined and learned Florentine.

Whether it was from this spirit of imitation, or from a really vicious motive, that the author introduced his allusions to, and paraphrases of Scripture, has not been clearly decided. There is too much reason, however, to fear that having had the penetration to discover the corruptions which religion had suffered from a licentious and ambitious clergy, he had confounded the abuse with the truth, and in his hatred of the one had forgotten the other. The poem begins with a paraphrase of the first

verse of St. John's Gospel. In the passage itself, however, there is little to blame except its irreverent introduction; and may it not be suggested that he had a particular reason for choosing this verse of Scripture? All the modern Platonists have taken great pains to reconcile their philosophy with the doctrines of Christ: St. John's Gospel especially has employed their ingenuity, and there seems great reason to believe that Pulci, seated at Lorenzo's table and surrounded by the members of his academy, selected the passage in question either to attract their immediate attention, or in allusion to the philosophical digressions with which he intended to vary his narrative.

Debased as the work is with faults of the kind alluded to, and others of a grosser character, Pulci has not wanted serious apologists; and to show to what length the opinion may be carried that popular corruption justifies literary licentiousness, all his faults have been excused on the plea that other authors were not less accustomed to use such freedoms than himself.*

The "Morgante Maggiore" contains many passages which it has been said would be irresistibly laughable if read even in the cave of Trophonius.†

* Crescimbeni. † Tenhove.

It also possesses many of the higher qualities which amuse in old romanesque poems, but the style is regarded by Italians as generally low and inharmonious. Its principal claim to attention depends on its having been the first poem of which the subject and characters were drawn from the far-famed histories of Charlemagne, and it derives a sort of glory from the magnificent productions by which it was followed. Pulci first showed how the chronicle, fabulously attributed to Turpin Archbishop of Rheims, and the great source of romance for several ages, might be employed by poets, and we cannot regard a production without interest that stands even in this relation to the "Orlando Furioso."

Poliziano lived on intimate terms with Luigi and assisted him in his poem, chiefly in pointing out to him the materials best suited for his purpose, of which assistance the poet makes grateful mention in the work itself. It is not known what was the fate of Pulci subsequent to the completion of the Morgante Maggiore, which was not published till after his death. He is said by some writers to have been an ecclesiastic by profession; but this is controverted, as is also the assertion that he died in great distress at Padua and was de-

prived of Christian burial on account of his impiety.

The celebrated Burchiello also flourished in this age, and obtained the attention of both the learned and the populace by his ludicrous and satirical verses. The style of these strange compositions is best described by the word "burlesche," derived from the name of the author, and since adopted into our and other languages. Burchiello, whose original name, it seems, was Domenico, was a person of low birth, and in 1432 set up the trade of a barber, by which he supported himself many years, and died at Rome in 1448.

Several other poets lived about this period, but their works are either unknown or wholly uninteresting to the English reader; or, as is chiefly the case, no materials exist for their memoirs. Francesco Cieco, a blind poet of Ferrara, wrote a romantic poem, entitled "Mambriano," about the year 1495, which obtained some notice at the time, but nothing is known of his fate except that he lived and died in poverty. Serafino Aquilano, who was born in 1466 and died at the age of thirty-four, obtained great celebrity by his talents as an improvisatore, and lived with honour at the courts

of Milan, Urbino, and Mantua; but his productions after about fifty years were forgotten, and afforded another instance of the great difference between the poetry which pleases when sung to a lute, or poured out at some moment peculiarly favourable both to the hearer and the bard, and that which is to afford permanent delight and bear the grasp of the mind in solitude and when the imagination is intent on its subject. I might name several other writers of the same class, but for the reasons above mentioned it would be useless; and the biographer, however willing he might be to rescue a neglected name from obscurity, is so generally dependant for his materials on the age which treated the subject of his inquiry with neglect, that he is usually obliged to follow in the same train, and let the dust lie where the ashes are deposited.

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